

Exploring the Impact of Homework on Student and Teacher Wellbeing: An
Ethnographic Study

By

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ABSTRACT

Student and teacher wellbeing is an important issue in education and has been a growing concern since the Covid-19 pandemic. There has been a rise in student anxiety nationally, as well as a teacher recruitment and retention crisis due to workload. As an experienced teacher in a school, first-hand observations have revealed the effects of workload, particularly on teachers and students. These can vary from an increase of workload, feelings of stress and a dislike of education. One major contributor to workload is that of homework, for both students and teachers. Although there has been an abundance of research about homework and the effects on attainment, progress and grades, very little has been conducted on the effects of homework on wellbeing. This research addresses this gap by using an opportunity for conducting an ethnography over two years within the same multi-racial, urban city in England. The school was an academy with higher than average disadvantaged students with students aged 11 – 19 years of age. This doctoral thesis is the only one of its kind which has focused on the impact of homework on wellbeing using an ethnographical approach.

The participants included 35 students - from years 7 to 13 and studying a range of subjects and 17 teachers - who held different positions in the school, had varying levels of experience and specialised in teaching different subjects. Individual interviews and focus groups were conducted with students and staff and photographs were taken to gain rich insights into the effects of homework on student and teacher wellbeing. The interviews and photographs were coded and thematically analysed where nine main themes were identified for students, and eleven main themes were identified for teachers. From these main themes and

subsequent sub-themes, recommendations and changes for homework were made to improve the wellbeing of students and staff. Together, these findings and analyses have resulted in the development of what is called 'The Four P' model of homework. The thesis concludes with recommendations for schools about how to review their homework policies and practice using the model to reduce the negative impact of homework on student and staff wellbeing. Implications for future research are discussed.

This thesis is dedicated to:

My family

For all the support you have given me and for putting up with all the missed day trips so that
I could work towards my goal.

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List of Abbreviations

BERA	British Educational Research Association
BGUTI	Better Get Used To It
DSL	Designated Safeguarding Lead
ECT	Early Career Teacher
EdD	Education Doctorate
HOD	Head of Department
HOY	Head of Year
IWM	Internal Working Model
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
OfSTED	Office For Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SAGE	Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies
SEN	Special Educational Needs
STB	Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviours
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

1 INTRODUCTION

Pressure on staff and students to gain higher grades and outcomes is arguably a significant contributor towards poor wellbeing within schools. This is felt by teaching staff (Jerrim, Allen and Sims, 2024) and students alike (Romanowski, 2004). This can be compounded further by the additional pressures of monitoring via OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) as well as the constant feeling of dread some teachers feel when OFSTED are due (Perryman *et al.*, 2025). The strain to get students the best results possible with limited budget and resources is felt by teachers and this pressure is frequently passed on to the students that they teach.

A common strategy to cope with these pressures and expectations is to do more. When the time in class is limited, *doing more* can only mean completing work outside of the classroom, also known as homework. Teachers work longer hours creating resources, marking homework and completing paperwork that can feel burdensome and unnecessarily justifying the decisions that they make. Students do more homework to try and improve the grades and attainment that they can gain during the limited school hours, and this can be unfairly overwhelming due to the multiple teachers all issuing an unachievable or ineffective amount of additional work. Combined, this is leading to a negative impact on student and staff wellbeing, where both are overworked, over stressed and exhausted by an insurmountable amount of work and pressure. As well as leaving teachers burnt out, this is resulting in a significant decline in teachers entering the profession (Department of Education, 2024) and a worrying number of experienced teachers leaving the profession. Although other factors

such as student behaviour, working conditions, pay and other factors contribute towards teachers exiting the profession, the increase in workload related to homework and its impacts on students and teachers warrants further investigation.

The result of this is even more work and strain on those that remain in the profession. For students, their wellbeing is in decline due to the amount of strain they feel from their schoolwork and the demands of completing additional work at home. A change is clearly needed, and this ethnography explores the impact of homework upon wellbeing; identifying the types or features of homework which staff and students value and aiming to illustrate the negative impact of homework on their wellbeing.

When exploring wellbeing, it must be recognised that this is a subjective and loose concept that can be defined or operationalised in various ways. For example, some would define wellbeing as “How we are doing” (The Good Child Report, 2020, p. 5). Others wish to define it in a specific manner that captures the multi-dimensional nature of wellbeing. One such definition is offered by Renshaw, Long and Cook (2015, p. 535) who state that wellbeing is “a meta-trait that encompasses all aspects of healthy and successful living, including psychological, economic, physical, and other domains”. This definition acknowledges that wellbeing is a complicated construct that includes a self-reflective and evaluative approach to an individual’s own wellbeing. A significant feature of this definition is the inclusion of “other domains”, as it recognises the importance of other aspects of a person’s experience that are important to their wellbeing that might be missed by researchers. This is important, especially when researching young people’s wellbeing, as a different generation will potentially have a new set of values, norms and parameters in which they measure

wellbeing that researchers are not aware of or would easily overlook. Given that student wellbeing is subjective and rooted in personal experiences, research must focus on understanding students' own perspectives. Ethnography is well suited to this because it enables the researcher to explore what students value in their everyday school environments. The qualitative data generated through this method offers depth and nuance, helping to reveal aspects of wellbeing that other methods might miss.

Before examining the literature related to wellbeing and homework, it is first useful to understand the current state of teachers' views and feelings within the profession of teaching. More recently, there have been challenges within the education sector that have had a significant impact on staff wellbeing directly, and indirectly. The aim of this preliminary section is to focus on different factors that have affected the wellbeing of the profession and to understand the importance of looking at teaching tools that can have a negative effect on wellbeing, such as homework. Additionally, these recent events have had a significant impact on students and an aim is to uncover the most significant recent developments in education that also affect them.

1.1 RESEARCHER'S POSITIONALITY - BACKGROUND, EXPERIENCE, AND RATIONALE

The following account of my experience and positionality aims to reveal the perspectives, assumptions, and potential biases that may influence my approach to the research. The school setting is an inner city, multicultural academy that has higher disadvantage than average. The ages taught within this school and by myself range from eleven to nineteen years of age. Having taught in this specific school setting for 8 years, I am within a

subculture of teachers who prefer working and setting homework in a certain way. For myself specifically, the preference is to set homework as pre-learning based homework in preparation for lessons. Declaring my positionality will reveal my rationale for conducting research on homework and wellbeing, as well as the underlying reasoning for my views on why there needs to be a change on homework practice.

Researchers being open and honest about their positionality is an important part of the research process. This will allow the researcher to be less biased and reflect upon their own beliefs and values prior to conducting the research, as well as leading to reflexivity upon the completion of their research (Holmes, 2020). This is particularly important when dealing with qualitative research such as the main study, as it allows readers to understand “where the researcher is coming from” (Holmes, 2020, p. 1) and how the results and transcripts have been interpreted. Furthermore, when exploring educational research, it is important to fully declare researcher positionality as there are varying sub-cultures within a school and a researcher could easily be part of one subculture and adopt those norms and values above others. This can be described as conducting “Culture-Blind Research” (Milner, 2007, p. 392).

Teacher wellbeing is a significant dilemma in education (Agyapong *et al.*, 2022) , and a contemporary topic that I feel passionate about. Firstly, regarding my own experience and positionality, I am an experienced teacher with approximately fourteen years of experience at varying levels. I have been a middle leader for approximately eleven years, experiencing middle leadership from a curriculum perspective as a Head of Department in multiple schools. I have also experienced middle leadership from a pastoral perspective for the last 3 years by being an Assistant Head of Year. I have taught in different key

stages and year groups varying from year 7 up to year 13, teaching subjects such as RSHE, geography, history, PE, RE, psychology and sociology. This has given me a good understanding of teaching in various departments in schools, as well as the challenges that other teachers also face. I have been privileged to be a mentor for trainee teachers for eight years as well as being a mentor for an Early Career Teacher (ECT). I have also been a union representative in the last few years which has given me a wider understanding of issues nationally within education.

During my years in teaching, I have seen a rise in teachers leaving the profession early. My experience with the union shows me this is not uncommon, and one factor is that this is due to high workload and pressure within the education system. I have seen this significantly increase recently after the pandemic as other professions offer more flexibility such as working from home, something that the teaching profession is unable to do due to the importance of face-to-face interaction with students. Workload has been a major contribution to this attrition rate, especially when it comes to additional tasks set upon teachers and the amount of marking teachers must complete. More recently, when a staff member needs to be replaced, it has been hard to find and recruit new staff.

Further concerns that I have observed is the number of teachers that have time off due to stress, and the acceptance of this as a norm within the educational system. Every year there are training days for teachers where presentations are made on mental health and wellbeing and the agencies and support systems in place for teachers when their anxiety or stress levels reach their peak (Lowry *et al.*, 2022; Beames *et al.*, 2023). This norm and acceptance of the need for support to be put in place and the expectation of mental

health problems occurring from the career is troubling. The focus needs to be on changing practice to prevent these services being needed, rather than buying into packages and agencies after teachers have had emotional breakdowns due to unsustainable pressure. Additionally, the rise in services used and needed for students due to a rise in stress levels are equally troubling (Lowry *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, the focus needs to be on reducing this anxiety, stress and workload in the first place rather than dealing with it when it has become overwhelming for students.

Since COVID, it is students are also struggling with the demands placed upon them. Students are becoming overwhelmed with work and struggle during exam periods. Exam anxiety is becoming more common place, especially in Europe (Ansari and Iqbal, 2025), and staff are now having to take on an additional responsibility for exam anxiety and mental health workshops. Due to lack of funding, student services and mental health organisations are becoming depleted and overwhelmed in the current school's area, and this is potentially similar in other school settings. This adds additional pressures on school staff and students as the help for these students is not available. Support and training for teachers to recognise, identify and support students with mental health is becoming recommended and becoming part of teacher training programmes and CPD sessions (Lowry *et al.*, 2022) . This is why we need to review the practices we have in education and see what we can change to aid staff and students' mental health.

Across the schools in which I have taught, homework has consistently been embedded as a central component of pedagogical practice. Within these settings, there has been a longstanding expectation that homework is assigned regularly, underpinned by the

assumption that it contributes meaningfully to students' academic progress and overall attainment. However, giving out homework and monitoring who completes the homework can be burdensome on teachers. Following up with detentions or following school policy for no homework can be a laborious task, especially when students frequently do not complete homework. In my experience, the time and effort required to follow up on these procedures has had a noticeable impact on my wellbeing and that of my colleagues. This often takes the form of increased workload pressure, higher stress levels, and a reduced ability to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Over time, these demands can contribute to feelings of fatigue, diminished job satisfaction, and a general sense of being overwhelmed, all of which affect overall professional wellbeing. This is exacerbated further when the homework is seen as a "Tick Box" exercise, where there is little value in the homework being given out. For example, in previous schools in which I have worked, homework timetables have been followed where students will be given homework after a set amount of lessons or on a set day. This has led to staff setting homework primarily to meet the expectations of this policy, and therefore setting homework with little prior thought or value in the homework that they are setting. Sometimes this homework is not checked or assessed and adds little value to either the student or teacher. When looking at the policies surrounding homework, it can sometimes be viewed in a negative light because they are being created just to adhere to OFSTED pressure. Despite doing this, OFSTED might even be able to see through this making the task of setting homework even less worthwhile. .

If homework is set in this manner, it is a waste of staff and student time, and consequently is of detriment to their wellbeing. With additional pressures both staff and

students face, it is important that we only assign them work that is useful and valuable. This may have led to some teachers setting homework that may add little value and be unlikely to be reviewed or used in class and likely to lead to follow up administration and create negative relationships with students. From a student perspective, they might believe they are being set tasks that they do not value and can sometimes gain very little from. One of the main drivers for conducting my research is to understand how we can provide homework which is valuable for staff and students without compromising either's wellbeing.

I want to create a homework strategy that staff consider positively impacts on their students' attainment and contributes to students' and staffs' sense of purpose notwithstanding their wellbeing. I aim to conduct this research and present it to my school's Senior Leadership Team in the hope to create a policy that within my school that is beneficial for all stakeholders and can be adopted across the school. The senior leaders in my school have been supportive in my research and have left me to carry it out unhindered which has been helpful as I have wide access to teachers and students to take part in my research. Speaking to other members of staff, they are pleased and willing to take part in my research as they hope for positive change in my school and the education system. I aimed to complete this thesis and be awarded a Education Doctorate so that my research would gain credibility and authenticity through approval by a prestigious university. I intended to use the findings to share with, and present to, other schools in order to support the improvement of staff and student wellbeing beyond my own institution.

It was for the reasons outlined above that I believed I was in a unique position to conduct an ethnography within my school. As a long-standing member of staff, I was well known and, I believed, well respected among the teaching body. In my role as a union representative, I had repeatedly demonstrated my capacity to maintain confidentiality and to prioritise teachers' interests and wellbeing. I anticipated that these factors would encourage staff to be open and honest, thereby generating richer and more meaningful findings than might be achieved through alternative methodologies or by an external researcher.

These qualities extended to my relationships with students, many of whom had known me over years. Having taught students across all year groups, I believed they were more likely to engage candidly with me than with an unfamiliar external researcher due to the trust and rapport that had built up over time (Pugh and Mosseri, 2023). My subject specialism in psychology further contributed to my interest in, and sensitivity toward, issues of staff and student wellbeing. For these reasons, I expected that the ethnography I conducted would provide an insightful and authentic appraisal of homework and wellbeing, offering detailed contributions to the wider body of research in this area.

Finally, my undergraduate degree in Psychology and my Master's in Health Psychology provided a relevant foundation for conducting research into concepts of mental wellbeing . Having developed a sustained interest in research practice and spent years studying how to conduct detailed, person-centred inquiry, I have built a solid methodological grounding for undertaking a larger-scale study with students and staff in a school context. Having conducted a similar research project on stress levels of students at university as

part of my Master's degree, I have a deep interest in how to improve individuals' mental wellbeing and quality of life.

2 PILOT STUDY

This chapter examined the pilot study that informed the development of the wider research project and allowed early consideration of the methodological and practical issues associated with exploring homework and wellbeing. The pilot provided a starting point and an opportunity to test and practice interviews, refine questions, and consider how students and teachers responded to discussions about homework and wellbeing. It also enabled the researcher to reflect on the suitability of the ethnographic approach and the extent to which it could capture personal experiences that shaped participants views of wellbeing. Through this preliminary work, the pilot study highlighted areas that required adjustment, such as the need to change to a semi-structured interview for the thesis research. By identifying these considerations at an early stage, the chapter demonstrated how the pilot played a crucial role in shaping the thesis study.

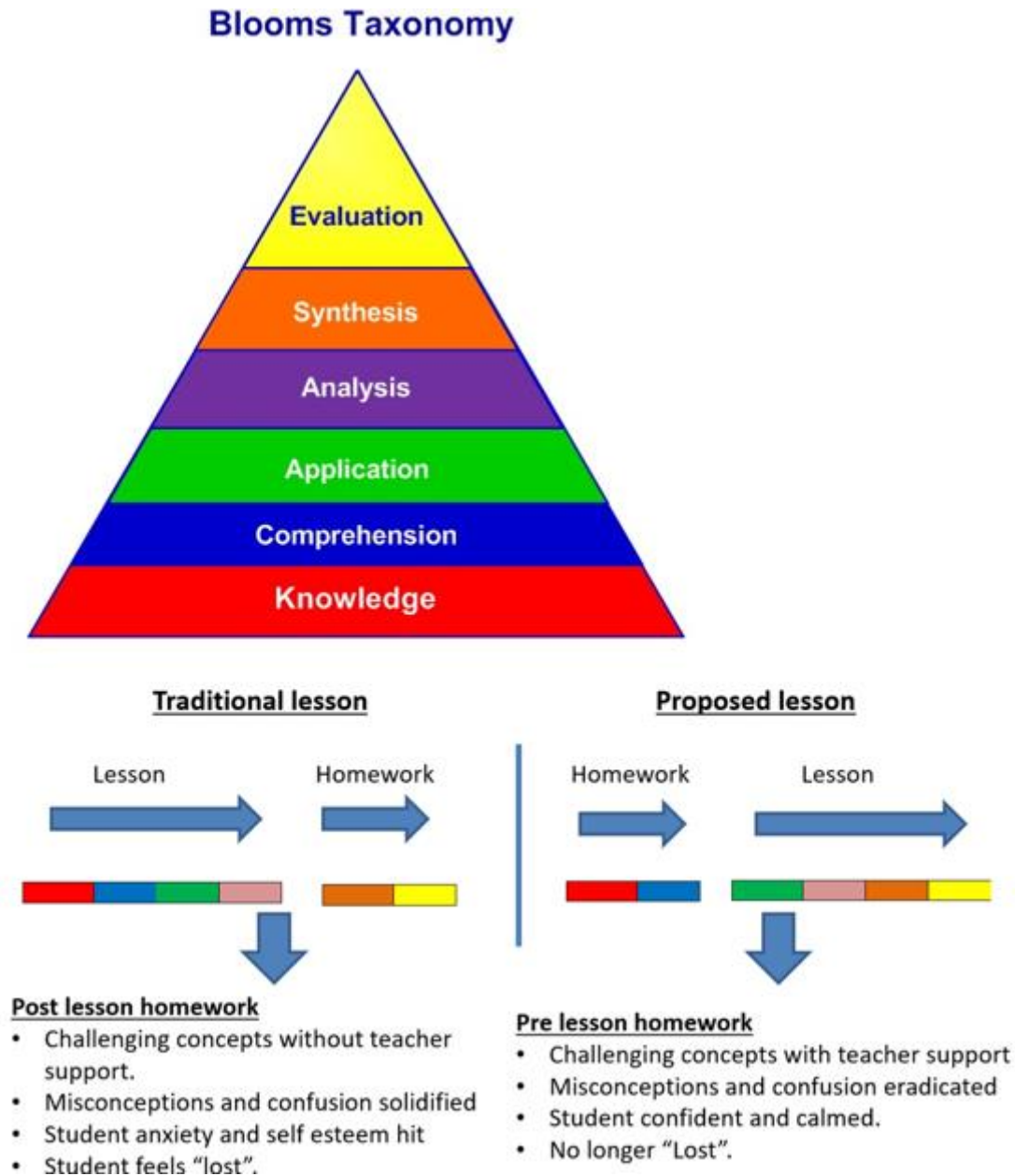
Prior to the main research being carried out, a pilot study was conducted to test the method used. The pilot study was included at this stage of the thesis because it had informed the development of the themes that shaped the subsequent literature review, as well as the research design for the main study. The aim of the pilot study was to allow for some improved modifications to the main investigation so that this could be as effective and as informative as possible. This allowed me to test my skills as a researcher and improved my confidence in my research ability. I believed it had also laid down the foundations for the main research project and would improve the overall quality of the ethnography to be conducted. The importance of conducting preliminary research such

as pilot studies was highlighted further by Kezar (2000), where it was stated that researchers can gain “first-hand, real-world experience with the issue studied to enhance the research design, conceptualization, interpretation of findings, and ultimately the results” (p. 385) . This research was particularly significant given that the pilot study, which was itself an ethnographic investigation in an educational context, closely aligned with the design of the main study. Furthermore, the decision was taken to conduct a pilot study prior to the main research as piloting can often be a neglected part of the research process, especially when gathering qualitative data (Malmqvist *et al.*, 2019). The pilot study subsequently informed the researcher regarding adaptations and improvements that were implemented in the main study.

The pilot study conducted prior to the main study was undertaken over a month-long period between November 2021 and December 2021. The pilot study was given ethical approval through the University of Birmingham’s Humanities and Social Science Ethical Review Committee. For the pilot study, five students were selected to gain an understanding of student perspective. However, these five students were all in the same age and year group. For this reason, the main research project included a larger sample and included students from multiple year groups to allow for a better representation of the student body of the school. Additionally, the pilot study also included one member of staff. Again, this is not representative at all to the main staff population in the school and more staff were needed in and therefore included in the main study.

The pilot study involved one teacher and five Sixth Form students. The teacher was interviewed individually, and the students participated in a focus group. Both interviews used unstructured, open-ended questions, and the recordings were transcribed for analysis. Once transcribed, the data were analysed using an inductive, exploratory approach appropriate for a small-scale pilot. Following guidance on early thematic work (Braun and Clarke, 2006), I began by reading and re-reading the transcripts to familiarise myself with the data and to note initial ideas. I then generated preliminary codes by identifying repeated comments, concerns and experiences raised by both the teacher and students. These codes were compared across participants to identify areas of convergence, and related codes were grouped together to form early, provisional themes. This process produced four initial themes: Purpose, Senior Management, Time, and Wellbeing (high stress, little sleep). These themes reflected issues that appeared consistently across the pilot interviews and offered a useful starting point for shaping the focus of the literature review. Although these themes were not intended to represent a full thematic analysis, they provided an early scaffold that informed the direction of the main study and contributed to the foundations of the model developed later in the thesis. This made a useful starting point in directing the focus of the literature, however, this allowed me to lay foundations to the model that I put forward at the end of the research. This can be seen overleaf in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Starting model of homework influences on wellbeing



A simplified version of the model (Figure 1, above) was created upon applying for the EdD (Education Doctorate) prior to the pilot study, and the pilot study findings supplemented this initial model to create the updated version below in Figure 1.

Students from the pilot study discussed how they preferred preparation-based homework

as opposed to homework that they completed after a lesson. Students described how they preferred taking and arriving to lesson with at least some basic level of knowledge as it made them feel like they had a foundation level knowledge and could build on that level within the lesson under the guidance of staff. This made students feel like they had a sense of autonomy and allowed students to stop the homework when they got to challenging items and could arrive at their lesson ready to seek guidance and support. Post lesson homework sometimes included students taking notes or undertaking assessments when they did not fully understand the concepts, and this led to too much time being taken on these homework tasks. This also led to students feeling like they were completing homework unnecessarily and the assignments were not adding any value to their education. Ultimately, the homework assigned to students as preparation, or pre-lesson homework, were described by students as having a smaller impact on their stress levels, sleep and overall wellbeing. The main research study intended to build on these findings to gain a more holistic understanding of the impact of homework on wellbeing and subsequently created a more refined model that can be applied to multiple year groups and practitioners.

In this model, I have compared original or traditional teaching methodologies and lesson structure with an updated model of lesson structure by using Bloom's Taxonomy as a way to illustrate this (Bloom, Krathwohl and Masia, 1964). Bloom's Taxonomy suggests lessons and learning starts with basic knowledge and understanding as the foundation and starting point in a student's learning. Over the course of a lesson or series of lessons , this can be built upon with more challenging content and skill acquisition, leading to application, synthesis or evaluation. Traditional lesson structures would involve in

students starting the lesson with activities, tasks or instruction to build on knowledge as a starting point, and throughout the lesson students would move towards higher order thinking or skills. At the end of the lesson, homework potentially would be set to continue upwards through Bloom's Taxonomy. As could be seen with a traditional lesson, homework is used as a method to extend or continue a lesson or to instruct students to rote learn content or assess students (Hamed, 2024). Typically, this results in support via a teacher or any other adult to be absent. This lack of support can also become more evident with those from lower income families or single parent families where the presence of an adult to help support with homework is less likely (Bempechat *et al.*, 2011). This can lead to frustration from students, incomplete homework, ineffective time management, and a detrimental impact to the time spent sleeping. This could subsequently have had a negative impact on staff who are required to follow up on incomplete homework, adding to their workload and own frustration.

In the proposed lesson structure, students would be set homework as a starting point on Bloom's Taxonomy, starting by learning basic knowledge or comprehension skills prior to entering a lesson, and therefore gaining expertise or adult guidance on harder concepts such as synthesis or evaluation within the lesson, as opposed to traditional homework setting. This could also reduce the possible issues related to adult support in homework highlighted earlier by Bempechat *et al.* (2011), as students might not need as much support at this stage.

The proposed model suggested students' completed homework on basic knowledge prior to the lesson, allowing them to focus their attention on more challenging concepts with

the lesson and with the aid of the teacher. The impact of this is that students ideally found homework easier to access and complete, stopping at a point prior to feelings of frustration occurring where instead students could understand homework as being purposeful as a preparation tool. Again, this should have limited the workload on the teacher regarding admin and follow up tasks as homework is potentially easier to complete and therefore more likely to be completed prior to the lesson.

This lesson structure and concept can be known as “Flipped Learning” and has become more widespread within education (Li, Lund and Nordsteien, 2023). Therefore, some schools might have started using this practice or even have been using this for years. However, the usage of this technique is likely to be implemented for attainment and teaching and learning purposes, as opposed to wellbeing purposes. Some educational settings have used this technique already and seen an increase in motivation with their homework and classwork (Ridwan *et al.*, 2023), albeit over a short period of time.

Although Bloom’s Taxonomy was used here as an illustrative guide, it must be remembered that the focus here is on staff and student wellbeing. It is merely used as an illustrative tool outlining the types of homework (pre and post lesson) or when to set homework as a guide for context. Furthermore, the initial model was overly simplistic by focusing on just “Pre Lesson” and “Post Lesson” homework, whereas alternative homework types exist. Despite the age of Bloom’s Taxonomy, it is still a highly relevant and applied to modern learning techniques and strategies (Chandio, Nishat and Solangi, 2021). Furthermore, Bloom’s Taxonomy is still used and recognised internationally as

well as recommended to taught to trainee teachers in the next few years (Hussain, Munawar and Nazeer, 2025).

A limitation that was addressed in the main study was that the five participants used were all obtained for the pilot study via an opportunity sample, which likely resulted in participant variables. The research was likely victim of selection bias of these students. Although the five students were not taught by the researcher, there is a notable possibility that the selection method for the sample led to students being approached due to having similar views of the researcher (Hiratsuka, 2025). This unconscious bias likely also extended to the single teacher that was approached in the pilot study also, and further showed the need for a larger sample, with more diverse backgrounds and experiences within the school, and a different selection process, especially for students.

The aim of the main research was to update and improve this preliminary model by having a wider representation of the school and viewpoints, with results adding validity to the model which could then be used throughout the school and possibly in other educational settings. An ethnography in my current setting with more participants was a suitable method to use so that rich and detailed data can best inform and improve upon this foundational model. An ethnography was the most suitable research tool to use due to it allowing the researcher to completely immerse themselves into the school and gain a deep understanding from multiple parties on the complexities of homework setting practice, and how these impact both staff and student wellbeing (Pole and Morrison, 2003). Alternative methodologies (which will be explored in the methodology section) which have been utilised by previous research such as questionnaires, statistical analyses

and other quantitative tools would not gain the deeper insights and understandings that an ethnography will capture (Woods, 1986). Therefore, an ethnography was used in the main research study so that the value added by the interviews and homework items obtained was directly applied to updating the initial model highlighted above.

The reflections drawn from the pilot informed the refinement of the interview types changing to semi-structured interviews.

The interview questions were developed and shaped by the pilot study, the preliminary model, and the wider literature on homework, autonomy and wellbeing. Insights from the pilot were particularly influential. The students and teacher often needed time and space to articulate their experiences in their own words. This highlighted the need for open-ended, flexible prompts that could adapt to the direction of participants' accounts. Drawing on guidance for constructing effective qualitative interview questions (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009), each question was linked to the research aims and allowed students and teachers to touch upon emerging themes from the pilot study, ensuring coverage of homework purpose, perceived demands, emotional responses, and contextual influences on completion (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) .

It also demonstrated and confirmed the usefulness of an ethnographic approach for accessing of students and teachers views on homework and wellbeing. Importantly, the pilot underscored the need for a flexible and ethical method, particularly when participants described experiences of stress, pressure, or emotional strain. With the results of this pilot study, this sets up the thesis well to move onto looking at the broader literature of homework.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW – INTRODUCTION TO THE PROCESS

This chapter examines the existing research on homework to establish the context in which this thesis is positioned. It reviews the dominant focus on attainment and academic performance, noting how wellbeing has often been treated as a secondary concern or overlooked entirely. The chapter also considers wider discussions about stress, time pressures, and the emotional demands placed on students and teachers, drawing attention to the gaps that remain in understanding how different types of homework might influence wellbeing. By bringing together these strands of literature, the chapter provides a clearer picture of what is already known and where further investigation is needed. This review therefore helps to justify the focus of the study and clarifies why an in-depth exploration of homework practices is necessary.

The purpose of the literature review was to examine key research in the field that is relevant to this study's examination of the effects of homework on student and staff wellbeing.

Relevant research needs to be identified and inspected to understand the background work that has been conducted prior and to consequently focus on uncovering unexplored areas and themes of wellbeing and homework. As the literature review is being conducted, gaps in research and methodology will be identified and linked to the main research study to be conducted. The process of reviewing literature started from the 20th April 2022 and finished on the 31st January 2024. The pilot study was conducted and completed prior to the main study, with overall data collection running from November 2021 to June 2024.

3.1 THE LITERATURE REVIEW PROCESS:

Having conducted a pilot study prior to this main thesis, insightful research has already uncovered some interesting and key research into the area of wellbeing and homework. However, upon reflection of a first literature review for this pilot study it was decided to have a more stringent quality assurance strategy via an inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 1 overleaf). This was put in place to make sure that only high-quality literature that had been peer reviewed and/or examined makes its way into the upcoming sections literature review (Boland, Cherry and Dickson, 2023) . It was decided to take on a Systematic Review approach to include strict criterion as what to include to make sure that what was included in the review process had a high standard of trust, and to fulfil the “Duty of doubt” (Thomas, 2017). Additionally, it was deemed necessary to include peer reviewed research and eliminate some of the earlier “Grey literature” (Bryman, 2012) such as conference papers, reports and government documents that have not been quality assured which I had used in my earlier pilot study literature review. The full criteria can be found in Table 1 overleaf:

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for the Literature Review

<u>Inclusion Criteria</u>	<u>Exclusion Criteria</u>
Date: Anything from the year 2000.	Date: Anything prior to the year 2000 (unless a widely cited/significant piece of research).
Location: Mainstream schools – Secondary, middle, independent, faith schools and sixth form colleges.	Location: Special needs schools. Primary schools.
Language: Research that is written in English or converted into English.	Language: Research that is not written in English or converted into English.
Participants: Students from the age of 11-19 in mainstream schools such as secondary, middle and sixth form colleges. Parents of students that fall into the category of above. Teaching staff.	Participants: Students under the age of 11 or over the age of 19. Students from special needs schools. Teaching staff who teach students in any of the above. Parents of students in special needs schools. Parents of students who have children who are below the age of 11 or above the age of 19.
Journals: Journal articles that have been peer-reviewed.	Journals: Journal articles that have not been peer-reviewed.
Other materials: Theses (peer reviewed)	Other Material, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Websites • Blogs • Unpublished research • Books • Magazines • Interviews

To select relevant literature, the title and abstracts of articles were read to establish which research seemed appropriate to include. Scoping searches were carried out to find an overview of the literature as a starting point (Boland, Cherry and Dickson, 2023). However, there was disappointment with the amount of relevant research that came up in the first

two searches that were conducted. Using the EBSCO database and including key features of the inclusion and exclusion criteria (such as published after the year 2000), only 10 results appeared when searching for “homework” and “wellbeing”. Of these ten, only three articles were seen as relevant due to them fitting into the original inclusion criteria, with the other studies falling into the exclusion criteria, such as being in a primary school setting, for example. . After broadening this search to include Boolean terms, 160 articles appeared and again, only three were seen as relevant. This was originally frustrating as it appeared that there was little amount of research to include in the review, but alternatively this was also pleasing as the research focus was on a chosen topic area that did indeed need to be researched more thoroughly. From this point it was decided that a blended and mixed method approach would be implemented and it was deemed necessary to continue to research articles to include via the above method and criteria, but also took an explorative approach. This involved reading research cited in the original 3 articles that fit the inclusion criteria and looking for research that had been cited within these articles as well as looking at research that cited these articles. Furthermore, key researchers that were identified and their work explored to find relevant research that fit within the inclusion criteria (Cooper, 1994; Cooper, 2007). Although Cooper (1994), does not fit the inclusion criteria of being published post 2000, this meta-analysis is highly cited within the literature and seen to be of such significance that it warranted an exception to the exclusion criteria and was therefore included in the final review. This was the only piece of research included in the literature review that did not meet the inclusion criteria. The research that was selected for the literature review was noted down in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, notes were made in Word regarding key findings, assertions by the author and follow up articles to read for the

exploratory approach mentioned earlier. The reference was exported into Endnote where a copy of the article was also attached to each reference for later reading or reflection. .

Regarding searching for key and relevant literature, it was decided to look at research from an international standpoint. Homework is not exclusive to the UK and is used in various countries across the globe. It is thought that the reviewing research on the topics of homework would therefore potentially have implications and fruitful findings for other countries. Additionally, due to the small quantity of articles appearing in literature searches on EBSCO, it seemed unproductive to review exclusively British or even European research as this would have been a further limiter on an already small pool of articles to review.

This review and consequent research will explore the differing types of homework and whether they have an effect (positive or negative) upon wellbeing. Breaking down these two key terms, they are arguably ambiguous and difficult to operationalise, especially when reviewing and examining research on an international scale where homework might be a term that is not used. To make the distinction of what is meant by “Homework”, it was decided that any work conducted away from the class teacher and additionally outside of designated lesson time will be classed as “Homework” (Gregory and Morón-García, 2009) . It was been noted that it is not uncommon for some students to complete homework during “Free periods” or “Study Periods” outside of their lesson time but is ultimately in school. The work allocated to these students is likely designed to be completed at home but the students for varying reasons might decide to do this work at school in these periods (Keith, Diamond-Hallam and Fine, 2004) . Furthermore, work completed at home without their school tutor will also be classed as homework (Avci, Özgenel and Avcu, 2025). The

distinction here is that this is without their tutor, as the recent COVID-19 pandemic has led to online and home learning with a schoolteacher via online video conferencing technology such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, for example. These would not be classed as homework as it is part of a lesson that is timetabled with their tutor, and therefore this is deemed to be part of a standard lesson but moved to online as opposed to in the classroom. The focus of the main research project wishes to focus on work that has been given to students to work on independently outside of designated class time.

Additionally, the term wellbeing is used to include psychological wellbeing such as mental health, happiness, potential to self-actualise, stress and anxiety levels (Kumari and Thapa, 2025) . Physical wellbeing must also be included in this, such as the ability to have time to exercise, eat, sleep, and maintain a healthy circadian rhythm (Capio, Sit and Abernethy, 2023). It must be noted that the phrase wellbeing is not intended to cross over to mental health areas which include diagnosis or inclusion of mental illness such as depression, sleep disorders, suicidal thoughts or tendencies or any other diagnosed disorder which includes a diagnosis, prognosis or physical or psychological treatment or monitoring by a professional (Budler, 2025) . It is recognised that the term wellbeing is highly subjective and will be interpreted in different ways from individual to individual, and this might vary further from culture to culture (Kuba *et al.*, 2022) . Therefore, the above distinction between clinical mental health and interpersonal mental health must be observed and noted.

3.2 PILOT STUDY REFLECTIONS

The pilot study results allowed for a recalibrated focus on literature prior to the main literature review. The Four Main Categories Influencing Wellbeing can be broken down accordingly:

1. Homework as Pointless
2. Homework set only because of Senior management policy
3. Homework Constraining Time
4. Homework Causing High Stress and Little Sleep

These categories were explored in the literature review prior to the main research project as a way of streamlining and focusing on the pertinent areas, as directed by the above key stakeholders who are affected by homework. These areas of interest were also highlighted in the pilot study's literature review and appeared to confirm the need to conduct research on these areas. The above-named areas are not mutually exclusive and are likely to be intertwined and interconnected with each other and their influences on wellbeing in general. Furthermore, to make the areas specified more encompassing for the literature review, the literature areas of focus have been modified to capture more relevant research to create a wider net for gaining articles that are relevant as it was noted during the pilot study just how niche the research connecting homework and wellbeing is.

Overleaf (Table 2) are the pilot study's categories as well as the amended Main Study Categories for the literature review in the main research and a justification for this.

Table 2: Main Study Categories for Literature Review Focus

Pilot Study Categories	Main Study Categories	Rationale
Homework as Pointless	Purpose	<i>Homework as Pointless</i> seemed to be an emotive and biased category, and it is believed that investigating the intention and purpose of setting homework may give insight into the effects on wellbeing.
Homework set only because of Senior Management Policy	Policy	<i>Homework set only because of Senior management Policy</i> is most likely to consist of stakeholders in school that create and alter policy in the school setting. However, this can also be influenced by external pressures and policies set at a local government or national level. Therefore, looking at policies broadly might be more informative than looking at just internal policy makers/setters.
Homework Constraining Time	Time	No change needed here.
Homework causing High Stress and Little Sleep	Stress Levels and Sleeping Behaviour	Although stress levels and sleep levels are reported to frequently be impacted by homework and/or schoolwork, it is believed that it is not just the amount of sleep that is affected by this type of work. It seems pertinent to also include sleeping behaviours, for example, disrupted sleep.

3.3 PURPOSE

The majority of students gave interesting views on the “Purpose” of the homework that they were given, saying that the tasks themselves seemed “Pointless”. Interesting comments were that students were doing certain homework tasks just “for the sake of having words on a page” and that they were given “pointless worksheets” to complete. This sense of what the purpose of the homework tasks students were given seemed to be a reoccurring and primary theme in the interviews, and some of the literature corroborates this. It appears that some institutions give homework to students and learning content,

gaining skills or enhancing their knowledge seems a secondary goal (Galloway, Conner and Pope, 2013). Instead, the point of homework was understood to enhance interpersonal skills such as self-discipline, studentship, and organisation. It was stated that the hard work and stress involved in homework were indeed necessary to prepare students for competitive work environments post education. Galloway, Conner and Pope (2013) obtained a large sample size of 4,317 students making a representative sample within their research setting. However, it is still unclear whether the purpose of the homework was communicated with students or whether students understood that this primary goal was the purpose of the homework. Regardless, it could be argued that students do not understand the purpose, or if they did understand the purpose, they did not value the homework and therefore it might have appeared pointless.

This issue of not understanding the purpose of homework is also cited in Gelen (2020) who states that a significant proportion of students complete homework due to fear of consequences of not completing it such as detentions, involvement of parents and/or caregivers or other sanctions. Clearly, these sanctions will have a negative impact on the mood and wellbeing of a child. This overshadows the primary and presumably educational purpose of homework and moves further away from an idealistic view that students complete homework due to a love of learning. The research by Gelen (2020), shows that students need to be involved in the homework practice decisions in school and education practitioners need to involve students and gain feedback from them as, "in general, student voice has been lacking about educational issues" (Galloway, Conner and Pope, 2013, p. 494). Students' interests in topics and homework interests are often neglected by the people that

set the homework (Jianzhong, 2012) and by gaining this information it would allow students to have an interest and understand the purpose of their homework set.

Additionally, not only is student voice neglected in research, but there is a disparity between parents, teachers and students on the purpose of homework and its uses in the classroom (Xu and Yuan, 2003). Although the sample was a relatively small of nine teachers and eight students, this research departed from the dominant focus on statistical and quantitative analyses (Cooper, 2007) and instead prioritised qualitative, open-ended interviews to understand these groups' views on homework . This approach led to interesting insights that would have been missed via the conventional statistical and quantitative methods used. For example, students highlighted that homework was frequently perceived as a task of compliance rather than meaningful learning, offering a perspective that statistical analyses cannot capture. Although parents, students and teachers view homework as a way of improving "Academic wellbeing" (Xu and Yuan, 2003, p. 32), and can instil skills such as responsibility and independence , there are some clear fundamental contradictory differences in opinion. Parents wanted their children to have more homework due to believing homework was a way of improving grades and that teachers care about their students' performance, whereas students wanted less homework and interestingly one student stated that homework is often "pointless" (Xu and Yuan, 2003, p. 40) which is interestingly the same phrasing found in the pilot study.

In addition Xu and Yuan (2003) found the interviews highlighted the possible negative impact of homework being set which is not marked or reviewed as it can embed mistakes and misinterpretations . For example, parents criticised homework being set and not

reviewed sufficiently to identify poor spelling and therefore not only does spelling not improve, but parents look harsh or negative when either correcting with their children or bringing this up with teachers. It would therefore be a fair assumption that some homework tasks and types might indeed be seen as “pointless” if they are not reviewed to give feedback and seem to be an exercise which is merely checked as completed or not completed without any further value beyond this approach. This is reinforced by Maier and Klotz (2025) who states that these mistakes are embedded in digital homework also. Feedback is an often underappreciated and an overlooked element in homework. For example, recent cross-cultural work showed that teacher feedback played a significant role in shaping students’ homework motivation and effort, yet most homework models overlook this. Wu *et al.* (2024) found that the type and quality of feedback students received influenced how they approach and value homework, and therefore it might increase the value that students place on homework tasks.

High quality feedback from teachers makes the homework more purposeful and more meaningful, and is likely going to increase response and effort rates as a consequence (Núñez *et al.*, 2015a). It is a fair assumption that students will feel more inclined to complete their homework and value it more if their teachers are willing to reciprocate their efforts by offering advice and guidance from this completed set work. However, as students’ progress through the school system, it appears that they gain less feedback from teachers and subsequently this leads to less motivation in students completing the work as it is perceived to have less benefits for the students (Núñez *et al.*, 2015a).

However, homework can have a positive influence and presumably primary objective to enhance attainment and learning such as consolidation of previous topics, as well as improving interpersonal qualities such as self confidence and self-esteem (Probst, 2019). Consequently, students who complete homework which improves their knowledge of certain subjects will consequently lead to an improvement not just in school work but achievement in school afterwards (Voorhis, 2011). This ideally is going to lead to an improvement in the long-term wellbeing of students by increasing their life chances post school. Homework that is given to students where it is marked and graded is often valued and students enjoy this homework as they see the intention of the homework and gain value from it (Borislava and Franque, 2010). This enjoyment of homework is enhanced further when students can choose the homework that best suits their individual needs (Kathleen and Donald, 2016) and the homework is purposeful and functional to address these learners needs.

Regardless of the purpose or views of homework, homework is a complicated and varied issues that is complex to unpack (Hunter, Leatherdale and Carson, 2018). As such, even defining homework can be highly varied and arguably difficult to confidently define. This is reinforced as the “definition of homework can be varied depending on the following features: purpose, degree of choice (voluntary or mandatory), amount, skill or subject area, deadline for completion (long- or short-term), and degree of individualisation and social context” (Bas, 2017, p. 31), and it is likely rare that homework has just one singular purpose. Homework is likely to have multiple purposes that interlink subject specific skills, interpersonal development, conform to institutional policy and include a third-party involvement.

Firstly, when we specifically look at the meaning of what homework is and how it can be defined, Cooper (1994, p. 7) states that homework comprises of “tasks assigned to students by school teachers that are meant to be carried out during non-school hours”. Although the meta-analysis from Cooper (1994) is now over two decades old, it remains influential in our understandings of homework practice and is a well cited piece of research. However, despite this, the definition is flawed in the secondary system and in contemporary society. When observing an educational setting, it is possible to see students doing homework in the canteen during break and lunch times, in the library, in after school homework clubs or even discreetly within other lessons. Students in education beyond the age of 16 and in a Sixth Form usually have free periods on their timetables for them to use how they see fit. This often includes academic reading, directed extra study, self-directed study or indeed completing homework that was intended to be completed at home by their class teacher. Therefore, the definition needs to be updated from “non-school hours” to “before or after allocated lesson time”. Homework that is set before the lesson is particularly important as this is an area that needs to be explored further when discussing homework. Pre-lesson homework operates differently from traditional post-lesson homework because it prepares students for upcoming learning rather than consolidating what has already been taught (Abeysekera and Dawson, 2015). This positions it within theories of flipped learning, which suggest that preparatory tasks can influence engagement, readiness, and lessons themselves (Bergmann and Sams, 2023). Despite this, pre-lesson homework is under researched in the literature, making it a significant area for further investigation (Fan *et al.*, 2017).

Investigating homework further, Cooper (2007) explains that homework needs to be effective. To achieve this objective, Cooper states that the three core components for homework should be:

1. Aid long term academic success
2. Non-Academic benefits
3. Greater involvement with the school and parents

The first bullet point above focuses on the teacher setting homework with the primary objective of improving their knowledge in that curriculum subject so that the students retain this knowledge in the long term. With pressures placed upon teachers to achieve the grades (Sallee and Rigler, 2008) and by exploring the pilot study's results, it does appear that this first bullet point is to be the primary, if not , the exclusive reason for setting homework to students.

The second bullet point focuses on improving the student outside of the subject specific curriculum. The focus here seems to be on interpersonal skills and studentship, with Cooper (2007) highlighting non-academic benefits such as greater self-direction, time management, self-discipline, problem solving and independence. Although these attributes are desirable and it would be ideal to have these instilled into young people and students, we need to consider how extensive homework needs to be in order for it to be instilled. For example, when looking over the literature review, it was evident that some students can spend more than three hours per night completing homework (usually depending on their stage of education). The reflective question here needs to revolve around whether three hours of homework per night is necessary to realistically instil and inspire students to develop the

personal attributes of the second bullet point. The amount of time that students spend completing homework needs to be reviewed and adopted into theoretical frameworks of homework completion. Without a realistic barrier, it could be argued that the opposite effect could be achieved. Instead of inspiring students who currently show good self-discipline and independence, an unrealistic amount of homework tasks that take too long will lead to procrastination, apathy and resistance. Perhaps an additional theory to blend together with this is that of Kohn (2006b), and the “10 Minute Rule”. This rule states that a student should be set a maximum of 10 minutes homework per year of age. Imposing these limits onto students’ homework time could allow for teachers to be more successful for growing the non-academic benefits highlighted in the second bullet point. This can be criticised as not being fit for purpose also, as an 18 year old student would therefore gain three hours of homework, which would arguably be seen as quite excessive and demanding on students, and could consequently impact upon their wellbeing.

A further issue with time-based prescriptions such as the “10-minute rule” is that they assume chronological age maps neatly onto students’ developmental capacity.

Developmental psychology consistently shows that this is not the case. Cognitive, emotional and executive functions mature at different rates for individuals, meaning that two students of the same age can have different levels of readiness for independent work (Eccles and Roeser, 2011). Neurodevelopmental research also demonstrates that the prefrontal cortex (central to planning, organisation, impulse control and sustained attention) continues developing well into late adolescence and early adulthood (Casey *et al.*, 2008). This has potential implications for homework, as tasks that require self-regulation or extended concentration may be developmentally appropriate for some students but overwhelming for

others of the same age. Classic developmental theories reinforce this point. Piaget (1971) notes that not all adolescents reach formal operational thinking at the same time, affecting their ability to engage with abstract or self-directed tasks, while Vygotsky (1978) emphasises that learning demands must align with a learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and be supported through appropriate scaffolding. Taken together, these perspectives suggest that homework expectations cannot be determined solely by age-based formulas. Instead, they must account for developmental variability and the uneven maturation of the skills required to complete homework successfully.

The third and final bullet point put forward by (Cooper, 2007) regarding greater parental involvement is also somewhat idealised. The intention is that homework enables parents to understand what their children are learning in school and encourages engagement with learning at home. It may also open a dialogue between school and family. However, this assumes that all parents are equally positioned to participate. Reay (2006), while focusing specifically on the experiences of working-class families, highlights how factors such as long working hours, limited time, and reduced confidence in academic content/ability can constrain parents' ability to support with their child's homework. This connection dates back to the highly influential ethnography by Willis (1977), who showed the discontent and rebellion against school systems and work in the working class. Although the analysis by Reay (2006) centred on these experiences, similar barriers, such as limited time, long working hours, and reduced confidence in supporting academic content, can also affect families from other socioeconomic backgrounds (Lutz and Jayaram, 2015). Taken together, these perspectives suggest that homework can generate conflict, frustration and resentment within families, with potential implications for children's wellbeing (Gao *et al.*, 2025). This

reinforces the need to revisit why and how homework is set, particularly in relation to assumptions about parental involvement.

The non-academic benefits to homework have been highlighted within research as a key incentive. Ramdass and Zimmerman (2011) focus on homework being especially useful for self-regulation for students. Self-regulation improves students' skills such as persisting at difficult assignments, overcoming unwanted emotions, inhibiting distractions, organising their environment, and reflecting on what they have learnt. Skills such as these are important for when a student goes through the educational system and as they approach closer to external exams, as well as helping gain positive dispositions for after school and into their adult life. Again, it must be considered how often homework is set to encompass these skills.

The importance of setting homework correctly to avoid detrimental effects on student wellbeing has also been highlighted by Carr (2013). Carr argues that homework is rarely researched or even set properly in the classroom due to the time and curriculum constraints that teachers face. When looking at the effectiveness of homework, five key points are highlighted as being essential when creating and deploying homework:

1. Purpose
2. Length and Difficulty
3. Ownership
4. Competence
5. Aesthetics

This is an area that needs to be revisited in the main study. Furthermore, the amount of time students spend on homework is a concern and this is also an area that has been previously highlighted. The difficulty and the length of homework must be considered when setting homework for a whole class of approximately 30 students, if it is the intention to challenge each child effectively. If homework is set generically and high achieving students find it too easy, this will lead to boredom and apathy. Alternatively, lower ability students will find it too difficult, and this will likely lead to frustration and lack of engagement. Setting homework that avoids either one of these pitfalls is difficult, especially when teacher time constraints has already been previously illustrated. Ownership is an interesting insight, as it suggests that students should have a greater involvement and connection with their homework. This might suggest flexibility for students, and thus might also contribute to improving students' independence. This is complemented with the fourth point of "Competence", as it states that students should be competent enough to be able to complete homework without additional support, such as that from parents for example. If students are unable to do this, it is likely to lead to frustration again. The final point on "Aesthetics" suggests homework should be inviting and appear interesting at a basic surface level as a minimum. Although this is understandable for younger students, this might not necessarily be the case for older students who are more focused on their exams and assessments. The first point of "Purpose" might assert itself as being more important for older students, although it is still noteworthy for younger members in secondary education.

If all 5 of the points put forward by Carr (2013) are met, then it would be plausible to suggest that students would engage with and complete their homework more readily, and consequently their wellbeing will remain at a high level. Perhaps teachers do not set

homework in this format as they have not had time to research homework and what makes it effective, as Carr suggested. Or perhaps homework is set primarily to meet school policy or homework timetables. If this is the case, student wellbeing could be compromised and this needs to be explored further. However, this assumes that the suggested five points (Carr, 2013) operate in isolation. Research suggests that homework effectiveness is also shaped by wider structural factors such as workload, home support, and school expectations (Cooper, Civey and Patall, 2006). Even if teachers follow Carr's guidance, these contextual constraints may still limit student engagement and wellbeing.

An institutional perspective of why homework should be set and completed is outlined by Epstein (1988), who states 7 key purposes behind homework. These are to:

- A) Practice skills
- B) Increase learning-task involvement
- C) Foster student-learner personal development
- D) Establish a link between parents and children about schoolwork
- E) Fulfil policy prescriptions of homework
- F) Inform parents about classroom activity
- G) Remind students of classroom requirements

Clearly there are some similarities between Epstein (1988) and the earlier mentioned Carr (2013), such as practising skills and to engage the students. However, at an institutional level, it seems that the child is no longer at the centre of decision-making, which consequently affects how far their wellbeing is prioritised. For example, point E where a purpose of homework is to fulfil the institution's policy, has no relation to the student

regarding achievement or wellbeing. This point is essentially stating that homework is being set for the primary reason that the policy says it should be set, and this has nothing to do with promoting or putting the needs of the student above that policy. Additionally, point G on reminding students of classroom requirements, appears to focus more on punishing the student, so that if a student has not completed work in class, it is completed at home as a homework task. This seems to be a negative approach towards homework and will result in resentment and a disdain towards schooling. This can have a direct impact on the child's wellbeing, and it can also impact teachers wellbeing, whose own wellbeing may be undermined by the additional workload and pressures that follow result from setting homework in this manner.

To add even more complexity, gender and even identifiable interpersonal personality traits such as the "Big Five" (Trautwein *et al.*, 2006a, p. 1096) introduce additional layers to homework research. These factors shape how individuals perceive the purpose and usefulness of homework. Furthermore, the effects of homework vary from subject to subject even within the same institution, for example Hunter, Leatherdale and Carson (2018) found that homework improved English grades and had little effect on Maths grades, and within a single institution homework might be used for a variety of reasons and not just for attainment. These could range from communication with the family to what is being learned in the classroom (Epstein, 1988), to developing interpersonal skills such as organisation or self-regulation (Ramdass and Zimmerman, 2011). However, it is difficult to ascertain why there is a discrepancy as to why some subjects may benefit from homework whereas other subjects do not. Ultimately, which such disparity and variation on homework use and

purpose, it is understandable why students can become unclear of the purpose of homework and the potential benefits it holds.

One key study that did go to great attempts to tackle this issue and speak to the key stakeholders of teachers, students and parents in regard to homework and the purpose of it was Sallee and Rigler (2008), who conducted interviews and tried to unearth the key impressions on homework. Parents seemed to agree that homework was important and contributed significantly to “academic wellbeing” (Sallee and Rigler, 2008, p. 46).

Interestingly, students struggled to ascertain the key purpose of homework as they noted that teachers only checked to see if homework was completed but did not check it or do anything with this homework. Providing feedback on homework is important not only to allow students to improve (Hattie and Timperley, 2007) , but could also allow students to see a great sense of purpose of the homework and as such, potentially value it more. This was seen by one student in the research by Sallee and Rigler (2008) commented that if the homework was to complete a certain sheet, then one student who has completed this homework would pass the sheet around to their peers and others would copy the work down and try to ‘pass’ this visible check in the lesson when teachers came to check homework. It seems clear that the intended purpose of this homework was not being met if students appear to blindly copy this work. Although the homework was set with the best intentions, these are not being met and can lead to a rise in conflict between teachers and parents, as well as between teachers and the students (Warton, 2001).

When interviewing teachers, Sallee and Rigler (2008) identified that there was clear ambiguity between teachers as to what the purpose of homework was also. Some teachers

gave homework to slowly introduce new concepts and to promote independent study skills, whereas other teachers gave homework as a way of getting through course content as quickly as possible due to time constraints in the curriculum and teaching timetable. It was argued here that if multiple subjects are setting homework so much, surely there should not be any ambiguity as to what the purpose and intention of the homework being set. It also appears that even when the intention is clear, the outcome might not be meeting these intentions. For example, one piece of homework which was set by the English department to read and analyse a chapter ready for discussion next lesson found that 57% of the 180 students searched for these notes online as opposed to completing the work themselves and these students did not read the chapter at all. After this homework was completed, the piece in question was subjected to a rudimentary check to see if it was completed and the assignments were seen as “meaningless” (Sallee and Rigler, 2008, p. 49). The findings in this study are telling. If over half of a cohort of 180 students avoided the task entirely, it suggests that the homework was not functioning as intended and that this was not an isolated issue. At the same time, the study does not report how many teachers were interviewed, which makes it difficult to judge how representative the teacher perspectives are. Without this information, the strength of the claims made about teacher intentions and practices is harder to assess, and caution should therefore be taken with the recommendations put forward.

Recommendations from this research suggested that homework should not be set as routine, such as being in part of a homework timetable. Homework should be set at a point in time when it is seen as useful and would add value. However, to do this requires teachers having autonomy to decide this for themselves. By having students completing homework

that takes a shorter amount of time, it is more likely that students will complete this task, and that the homework will meet its intended purpose.

Finally, a significant finding from Sallee and Rigler (2008) was found when teachers recognised that students had other important deadlines such as university applications. Students were consequently quite appreciative of having a break in homework and were re-enthused and even excited to complete these important applications. Regardless, a clear conclusion from this research highlights the need to revisit the purpose and point of homework as this seems to be unclear in some institutions, and this will negatively impact the wellbeing of staff and students if they are distributing and/or completing homework where the point of that work is unclear.

It has been pointed out that a key ingredient to good quality teaching practice and homework setting lies within the planning and purpose of homework prior to the lesson and setting the homework with students. Research from Rosário *et al.* (2018) conclude that students' perceptions of homework quality are an important predictor of homework behaviour. When students view homework as well planned and clearly connected to future lessons, they are more likely to complete it and less likely to interpret it negatively. If homework was seen as "well prepared and interesting" (Rosário *et al.*, 2018, p. 170), the tasks were more likely to be completed and this was witnessed in more than six subjects and had a lasting effect two years later in a follow up. The key message here is that homework must be well planned and have an underlying and well considered purpose prior to it being set, and when this is the case, it has more impact and is interpreted more positively by students. However, although this research gives an indicator the importance of

the purpose of homework, it focuses significantly on the statistical side of homework by using a multilevel structural equational approach. This approach looks at the purpose of homework at differing levels (student, teacher, classroom, school or parent) which is commendable at recognising the multiple stakeholders impacted by homework, but links between this purpose and wellbeing have been omitted.

This was a growing trend at the time (Cooper, 1994), and there is a need to reassess these issues by focusing more on qualitative data and uncovering the experience of today's students. Maths homework in particular is seen as different to other types of homework due to the nature of maths tasks as well as the perception of the subject and feelings towards maths and their self-perception of their ability within that subject (Landers, 2013). Furthermore, apart from the subject specific limitations by focusing heavily on maths (which seems to be a norm across homework research), there are limitations with the methodological approach also. A self-reflection within the above research highlights the need for this, as the researchers' state:

“To further address the perceived homework quality, future studies could use qualitative data to help unveil its importance. For example, interviews could be conducted with students to learn their conceptions about how homework may help improve their learning.” (Rosário *et al.*, 2018, p. 177).

The present study therefore focuses on qualitative data, using semi-structured interviews with both students and staff and examining homework samples brought forward by both groups (). Only by taking this approach can we see student and staff views on the purpose of homework and consequently their wellbeing. Additionally, this thesis will undertake

interviews and samples of homework from a variety of subjects as to fill in gaps of previous research. For example, when qualitative and interview methods were uncovered in the literature review process, the focus was still with maths homework (Landers, 2013) and it is necessary to conduct research on other disciplines within schools to get a holistic picture and understanding of homework. In secondary schools, maths is seen as an important and core subject, but students typically study more subjects in mainstream education and these other subjects need to be investigated and differences between perception of different subject homework practise need to be uncovered.

Homework is frequently seen in a negative light in popular culture (Landers, 2013) due to some of the negative connotations highlighted above, but is however seen as necessary to enable the future success of students. Landers' (2013) work, while only examining two case studies in detail with their ethnographic research, still highlighted fundamental flaws in homework setting that was counterproductive to the initial purpose of the homework. Some common objectives of setting homework are to make students more independent as well as to engage and include parents with their child's education. However, the research found that as childtudents ren got older and worked their way through the education system, the harder the homework becomes, and students are less able to gain help from parents due to the growing difficulty. Therefore, as students' progress through their school lives, they gain less support from their parents (which arguably promotes independence), and homework may also become less accessible or harder to achieve due to this lack of support.

The findings in the study by Landers (2013) were also supported by Núñez *et al.* (2015a) , who also found that as students go through the years, the feedback by teachers seemed to lower in quality and had less impact. Students benefit from feedback and can act upon the guidance by their teachers, and if this starts to deteriorate over the years, the perception of pointless homework likely increases over the years. Ethnographic research not only observed students struggle to complete homework over the years, but also led to experiences of “mathematical trauma” (Landers, 2013, p. 376) where students experienced mixed negative emotions from homework. The term “*mathematical trauma*” used here displays the intense feelings of students who struggle with their maths homework, but the specific use of the word trauma must be used sparingly. According to the DSM-5, trauma is often the result of “actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, p. 271). While the experiences of students might be disturbing, it is highly unlikely that they had met this threshold with their experience of homework. Other studies also use this term (Lange and Meaney, 2011) and there must be care that negative emotional reactions are not pathologised. However, the sense that more than one study has used this term highlights the urgency for research in this area, especially if students themselves use this term.

Although student wellbeing will be visited later in a dedicated section (Section 3.5) , it is noteworthy that sometimes the purpose of homework is to intentionally give a negative consequence to students (Rosário *et al.*, 2015; Cooper, 2007). Some practitioners might see this as needed as it teaches students about discipline and timekeeping, however it only

reinforces the popular negative views of homework and students' perceptions of it being "pointless". However, there seems little evidence that this type of homework is effective in improving students' academic behaviours other than to avoid punishment, and homework that orientated towards improving learning has much more of a positive effect on students as opposed to homework as punishment (Rosário *et al.*, 2015) . It is also worth noting that teachers who monitor, have high control and involvement in students homework are more likely to have students that copy completed homework from their peers (Trautwein *et al.*, 2006a) which likely defeats the intended purpose of the homework set in the first place. It has been seen that teachers who monitor homework too much are seen as "controlling" and this undermines students' motivation to complete homework (Xu *et al.*, 2022, p. 8) , and a fine balance is needed between not being too controlling but also not giving too much liberty to students. However, leaving students and trusting them to complete work independently will likely result in homework not being completed if not monitored.

Students being trusted to complete their homework is something that teachers are unfortunately vulnerable to. This might be due to a lack of self-efficacy (Tsang, Dang and Moorhouse, 2025), for example. However, by giving students independence and a sense of autonomy with how and when they do their homework, teachers potentially lose control and awareness of whether homework has been completed, and this might lead to students taking an opportunity to choose not to complete the work as they know the teacher will be unaware. Teachers are not able to help students with homework or direct them outside of classroom time in terms of when and how they should complete this homework. Students often have distractions or other tasks that they might prefer or need to do over the designated homework, and therefore students' self-regulation is a significant component as

to whether a student completes this homework or not (Yang and Tu, 2020). Homework itself is an important tool that can help improve students' self-regulation, however, if the homework task is not seen as useful or purposeful, it seems less likely a student will complete it. Volitional control is vulnerable to temptations of other activities, distractions and other obstacles and Yang and Tu (2020) describes how frustration can hinder a student's ability to successfully self-regulate. This is tested especially in the case of homework as the homework is set by the teacher and not by the student, and this is likely exacerbated further if the homework task is not perceived as useful or beneficial for the student, either academically or interpersonally. Furthermore, (Yang and Tu, 2020) investigates how to improve student self-regulation by testing and advising students to manage their environment, making sure there is sufficient time to complete the task, focus on the task, increase motivation and self-regulate their emotions. However, a flaw here is that it has failed to recognise or look at the homework task itself and what the rationale and outcomes of completing this homework task were. If the homework task is not perceived as useful or beneficial from the student, then the prior five strategies could prove to be irrelevant. In this case, the task set is likely to be more influential on whether the student completes the task rather than the self-regulation abilities of the student, and consequently this will also influence the student's wellbeing as well as the staff member's wellbeing when it comes to receiving or assessing this homework.

A limitation of the above literature on homework and self-regulation is the assumption that all pupils possess similar cognitive and emotional capacities to manage their learning independently. This overlooks the diversity within school populations, particularly pupils with SEND, and therefore the research on self-regulation may not be representative of these

pupils. Asking a student to do homework as a way to help them self-regulate, organise themselves or deal with inner frustration might be extremely challenging or unrealistic in the case of SEND students. This raises important questions about the equity of homework practices and the extent to which models of self-regulation - such as those proposed by Yang and Tu (2020) - are applicable to pupils with SEND.

Research studies on the perception of homework and its purpose are from students points of view, and very little research focuses on the teachers' views and perception of homework (Rosário *et al.*, 2015). As teachers are the ones who set the homework, it is important that there is an understanding in how and why they set homework (Xu, 2005), and there is a need to assess whether students can appreciate their intentions. Rosário *et al.* (2015) state that teachers usually set homework to either practice previously taught techniques or methods, prepare for the next phase of their learning or lesson, or to extend on what has been learnt so far. The research found that out of these three key intentions of homework, extension seemed to provide the best results. However, a similar problem with this research and others is the focus entirely on maths students. Extensions might be the most effective homework type set for maths, but that may not be the case for other subjects such as English or other subjects such as humanities. Clearly research needs to be undertaken in these areas as to what is the most effective homework to be set (if at all) rather than making an overgeneralisation to all teachers that extension is the most beneficial homework type. Rosário *et al.* (2015) conducted interviews with the maths teachers as part of their research and a common issue was that homework set to all students was very similar in design. Issues that were highlighted in these interviews were that of a lack of time to prepare the homework being set, the number of classes that they teach and being unable to adapt or

change their homework to the needs of their students. One teacher stated that it was the first time that they had reflected and thought about the purpose of why they set homework which further displays the little time that teachers have available to adequately plan and prepare their homework tasks. It is easy to see why students might have negative views of homework if they can perceive this lack of time or planning by teachers, or if they are set work that does not seem to have a purpose or matches their learning needs.

As illustrated by the above sampled research, there is a need to investigate students' views on homework and there are gaps in the research that need to be filled. Sun, Du and Xu (2020) correctly labels the lack of students views on homework as "disturbing" (Sun, Du and Xu, 2020, p. 1740) and it is a neglected and limited focus in the research pool. The views of students are significant and must be investigated in much more detail. It is imperative that more attention is directed onto the perspective of students regarding their homework so that an understanding of what they value and the subsequential effect on their wellbeing. If homework is completed and it has little or no benefit to the student, it will only serve to have a detrimental effect on their views of education and their mental and physical wellbeing. Furthermore, it is important to also note that although teachers and parents state homework can have benefits such as self-regulation, self-direction and time management, students seem to overlook these benefits and see homework as primarily for academic benefits (Sun, Du and Xu, 2020). Students not identifying or understanding these benefits or rationale will likely only lead to further resentment or apathy towards homework. Finally, the limited research pool seems to focus on collectivistic cultures where there are more traditional values, academic success and teacher approval is prioritised and where there is likely to be an alternative cultural difference with regards to how homework

is perceived. There is clearly a gap for a westernised perspective on how students perceive their homework tasks assigned to them and how much value they place upon them.

Given the diversity of purposes, formats and expectations associated with homework, a clear operational definition is required to guide this thesis. Existing definitions discussed earlier vary widely. Some emphasise the location of completion (Cooper, 1994), others highlight purpose, autonomy, or duration (Bas, 2017), while more recent work points to the increasing blurring of boundaries between home and school learning spaces (Fan *et al.*, 2017).

Contemporary educational practice and the use of new technologies further complicates traditional definitions. Furthermore, students frequently complete homework during breaktimes, in supervised study areas, in after-school clubs or during free periods, meaning that “non-school hours” (Cooper, 1994, p. 7) is no longer an accurate or meaningful criterion. In addition, the growth of digital platforms (such as VLEs) and flipped-learning approaches has expanded the scope of homework to include preparatory tasks designed to prime students for upcoming lessons (Abeysekera and Dawson, 2015; Bergmann and Sams, 2023). These shifts suggest that homework is best understood not by *where* it is completed, but by *when* it is completed in relation to formal lesson time, and by the pedagogical intention behind the task.

For the purposes of this thesis, homework is therefore defined as *any task set by a teacher for completion before or after allocated lesson time, undertaken in any location, and intended to support preparation for learning, consolidation of learning, or independent practice*. This definition includes both traditional post-lesson tasks and pre-lesson preparatory work, reflects contemporary patterns of study in secondary and post-16

settings, and aligns with the broader literature on homework purpose, flexibility and pedagogical function (Cooper, 1994; Bas, 2017).

3.4 TIME

Time is the second category that will be of a significant focus in this literature review due to this common theme arising as an issue for students and the members of staff from the original pilot study. It appeared in the pilot study that students and staff were becoming more and more frustrated and concerned with the amount of time homework took to complete as well as how much time it took away from completing other activities. These other activities varied from completing lesson planning, marking or other admin tasks for the teaching member of staff. With regards to the students, one student commented about how the homework tasks given take up too much time outside of school and stated the ratio of work and leisure time had a 90:10 split whereas ideally, they would like to at least have a 50:50 split. Furthermore, the time taken up completing school related work took valuable time away from other activities students wanted to take part in, and this even influenced their religious practices as they felt they had little time to carry out religious based rituals and traditions with family. The pilot study also shed light onto the amount of time staff spend on setting, checking, marking, and following up on homework related tasks. It was found that staff spent a significant amount of time creating and setting homework tasks for students to do and would take up hours of marking time depending on what the homework assignments were. Frustratingly, it was stated that the follow up on students not completing

homework tasks and following the school's policy on incomplete homework would take further time. Although this pilot study only interviewed one member of staff, the expectation is that this view is not believed to be uncommon and the subsequent literature in this review reinforces this. As evidenced by the initial findings in this pilot, researching the time students take on completing work is a key area to research and explore as homework can have negative connotations due to removing and restricting the free time staff and students have outside of school.

Firstly, it is worth noting that there has been a significant shift recently in the amount of homework, or at the very least home-based learning, because of the Covid-19 pandemic that has swept across the world recently. At varying points during the Covid-19 pandemic, aspects of education have been exclusively at home with online lessons, assignments and school tasks set remotely via Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) or email (Brooks *et al.*, 2020). Due to fears of spreading the disease, schools across the country were placed in national and local lockdowns. There were periods of national lockdowns where the entirety of British education was home based, and local lockdowns appeared when certain boroughs gained what was deemed dangerously high or climbing numbers of cases of Covid-19. However, with the pandemic now over and teaching returning to classroom-based teaching, the literature review will focus mainly on the face-to-face teaching methods (Hodges *et al.*, 2020) with traditional homework setting. It is worth noting that some elements of teaching and homework setting practices from Covid-19 might still be in practice and will be included in this review where relevant.

This global event also increased the workload for teachers (See, 2024), with the additional setting of work, learning new technologies, and other new administrative tasks. Marking in particular increased during periods when teachers were working from home (Johnson and Coleman, 2025). However, the teaching profession has been well overworked for years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, so this extra burden had really exacerbated the already low wellbeing of teachers. The time taken to mark work increases with the age of the pupils and difficulty of the tasks set also (Stewart-Brown, 2009).

At the start of the pandemic, teachers spent more time planning their lessons, marking and carrying out other administrative tasks as they adapted to the sudden change in teaching (See, 2024). The majority of teachers were working longer hours and working more than 51 hours per week (Teacher Wellbeing Index, 2019), and 72% put these long hours down to why they felt high levels of stress. However, Walker, Sharp and Sims (2020) found contradictory findings were of the 3,000 respondents, a typical working week of 52 hours pre-Covid fell to 47 hours during Covid. When exploring the results further, there was a “wide distribution of working hours” (Walker, Sharp and Sims, 2020, p. 3) showing that teachers experiences of the impact of their workload varied. This variation could be down to an increase in marking of homework during the pandemic as suggested by See (2024), but still remains unclear and needs to be explored further.

Some argue that marking policies needed to change to help teacher wellbeing as marking can become a heavy burden due to the quantity of marking that teachers have (Armstrong and Tsokova, 2019). This ongoing and persistent issue of marking and its direct impact on

wellbeing for teachers clearly needs to be explored further as it has been a constant issue that has not been resolved.

Research shows that when homework tasks are designed to be meaningful, supportive and engaging, students are more likely to enjoy completing them (Avcı, Özgenel and Avcu, 2025). However, the large amounts of homework set and the subsequent amount of time students have to spend to complete these tasks can lead to irritability and boredom (Brooks *et al.*, 2020). This argument is against what would plausibly be a primary objective for the use of homework which is to engage students beyond the classroom. However, the amount of homework students experience is demanding, taking large proportions of time away from children's leisure activities and other interests (Jiri, 2009). As Jiri (2009) indicates, this leads to a "Homework Problem" where students have demands on their time where they feel they cannot complete everything that they need to do and have time to themselves to enjoy other pursuits outside of curriculum based education. As much as 49% of students struggled to find time for extracurricular activities due to the amount of time they needed to spend after school completing homework (Sallee and Rigler, 2008).

When quantifying the amount of time students spent completing homework, Galloway, Conner and Pope (2013) noted that 3.1 hours of homework is set per night for upper and middle school students. Worryingly, only 6% of these students' state that the hours spent on homework was seen as useful. This highlights a critical need to investigate further as students are being set hours of homework per day and the key stakeholders completing the work find it is not useful and arguably a waste of their time. The research by Galloway, Conner and Pope (2013) focuses on a large sample of 4,317 students with a mean age of 15

from ten high performing schools from upper-middle class communities in America. Despite the high number of students surveyed, there was no input from the teachers as to what homework was being set or why it was being set. An insight from the teachers would have been useful here to understand if there was a specific type of homework that was linked to poor wellbeing, as well as what the impact of the wellbeing was on the teachers when they received and possibly marked this. Furthermore, not only did this thesis include teachers in its sample, but it also provides insight into lower-income and disadvantaged communities, as the participating schools serve these populations - a demographic missed by Galloway, Conner and Pope (2013).

Clearly there is a debate of whether homework needs to be fine-tuned to make the 3.1 hours useful for the students, there needs to be a reduction in the amount of time completing homework or both. The voice and views of students would be a great insight into the best actions when reviewing homework in terms of the amount of time needed and the tasks set, however this is a neglected area (Jianzhong, 2012). Students and staff views on the amount of time that should be spent on homework is minimal as research on homework mainly focuses on the academic benefits rather than the time spent completing tasks leading up to the researched academic benefits. Overall research into homework is largely blinded on the outcomes of homework as opposed to the process of the task itself. Due to students not having an interest in the homework or not finding it useful, students tend to spend less time on the homework than if they found the homework engaging or if they could see a benefit to completing the work. The need for this review is exacerbated further when research tells us that not only the hours spent per day on homework are seen as demanding in terms of hours per day, but the fact that homework is set so frequently in

the week also. Bempechat (2019) states that 42% of students are given homework 5 days a week, displaying how a student can be given homework after every school day and how the free time at the end of each of these days is also restricted. Combining the results of both Bempechat (2019) and Galloway, Conner and Pope (2013), some students might be given 15.5 hours of homework to complete per week, which is a concerningly large amount of time on a weekend to be completing work if they chose to have their free time in the week. Sometimes students might not even have a choice as to if they wish to complete their homework on the weekend.

Homework is almost seen as a daily task for students to complete and seen as the normal behaviour and expectations of being a student (Xu *et al.*, 2022). Fumarco and Schultze (2020) states that some students will be given one hour's worth of homework to be completed on a weekday, and an additional hour's worth of homework that needs to be completed on a weekend and ready for the following week. This further highlights the lack of time that students must complete homework and how students sometimes do not have control of even when they complete this work. This shows that the construct of *time* in homework is complex as it is not just the total amount of time that is needed to complete the homework, but the specific time that homework must be completed for a set deadline with a limited amount of time for the turnaround.

When students and teachers were asked about the amount of time spent on homework and the effects it has on them, they stated that they were "more overcommitted than ever" and constantly "juggling conflicting responsibilities" (Sallee and Rigler, 2008, p. 48), which displayed that there were significant time constraints in the day with regards to homework

and when it can be completed. These responsibilities can also range from completing homework for other subjects, contributing towards household chores, and helping with the day-care of younger siblings. This further highlights that the decisions and sacrifices that students must make are high staked and students will likely feel conflict regarding how best to allocate their time. This could also be due to a lack of guidance on how much homework should be set, or at least an upper limit on the amount of homework that can be set. Xu and Yuan (2003) conducted interviews with teachers, parents and students' views on homework and it showed that teachers were concerned with homework and how much they should set. It was found that teachers were unsure of how much or how little should be set and this can lead to large variance between staff within schools. It is fair to assume this variance could be enlarged further when comparing between schools. One teacher was told by the headteacher to reduce the amount of homework set due to it taking some students between two to three hours per night to complete. This highlighted a lack of consistency with homework setting and expectations within the school. Furthermore, there seems to be an incongruence between teachers, students and parents in the research by Xu and Yuan (2003), as parents wanted more homework for their children, children wanted less homework, and staff were widely unsure of how much to set. This highlights the lack of clarity and consistency on how much time should be set on homework and can lead to frustration and even resentment of certain teachers for setting more homework than others as it is seen as some teachers are taking away more of a student's free time than other teachers. However, what students and staff do share in common with their views on homework is that there is a lack of time (Núñez *et al.*, 2015a).

Furthermore, teachers complain about a lack of time to create and prepare homework assignments and students complain about the lack of time to complete these homework assignments. Additionally, both stakeholders agree that homework not carried out correctly can have a counterproductive effect and ingrain and consolidate errors, so rushing homework can have a negative effect. This recurrent theme of time as a barrier shows that time needs to be probed further as there might be a way of changing assignments so that they enable both staff and students to have more time, or it needs to be considered whether the homework is valuable enough to be worth setting in the first place. What this does emphasise is that the quantity of homework and the realistic completion time urgently needs to be researched and arguably reform is needed across educational settings.

The views of teachers align with the views of students, each sharing the same concerns regarding the amount of time spent on homework. This concern arguably increases with each key stage in education; with key stage 4 and 5 suffering the highest amounts of time spent on homework. Fumarco and Schultze (2020) raised concerns as the older a student became, the more homework they received and subsequently had to be marked. A positive correlation was found between the age of a student and the amount of homework they received, with older children receiving more work and therefore requiring more time to complete this work. However, it has been argued that this correlation does not necessarily translate into improved results or attainment for students (Trautwein *et al.*, 2006b).

Students who spend more time completing homework do not necessarily gain better grades in school, and actually (161) the reverse can be true for students that receive excessive amounts of homework (Guo *et al.*, 2024) . Although this could be accounted for by weaker students who are struggling taking more time to complete homework.

Differences in students' reading abilities, working memory and self-regulatory capacity all impact on how long a task takes and experiences that students (Swanson and Jerman, 2007). Due to these differences, extensive time spent on homework might be down to cognitive overload, limited understanding of the homework, or difficulties with attention. Further studies have shown that students that struggle with executive function skills are also prone to make more errors, and thus take longer to complete tasks (Clair-Thompson and Gathercole, 2006). The impact on wellbeing for such students when completing a homework task at home, potentially independently without adult support or supervision, is an area of research that needs developing.

The homework literature does not examine how individual differences influences the amount of time homework duration takes. Large scale meta-analyses compare homework time and achievement, but do not consider individual differences (Dettmers, Trautwein and Lüdtke, 2009). Moreover, although research on socio-economic context and parental support in homework was linked with academic performance (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001), there has not been a link with the amount of time it takes to complete homework with or without this parental support. The limited research into individual differences displays a notable gap in the literature.

Regardless of the impact on homework on students' grades, there is still an impact on teachers. Teachers who teach older students spend more time on planning, setting, marking and following up on homework compared to teachers who teach younger age groups (Stewart-Brown, 2009). This is an area worth exploring as if there is indeed disproportion

within the education sector with the amount of marking teachers complete, then there is clearly a need to review how much homework is set for varying year groups. This is a factor that needs to be considered when staff allocate how much homework to set students, and it must not be a standardised time allocation for all teachers or all year groups.

Furthermore, when teachers feel they do not have enough time to mark work, the work tends to be superficially checked at face value and no or little insight into students' progress or meaningful feedback is given (Probst, 2019). This raises the question of the benefits of setting homework if the only consequence is leading to teachers not having enough time to gain insights from the tasks that they set. It is likely that the older students in a school will be able to perceive or suspect this, which subsequently makes these students feel the homework tasks they complete are a waste of their already constricted time.

Research by Brown *et al.* (2011) states that there was a growing trend of setting more and more homework to students which subsequently restricted the amount of free time that they had. The trend showed that there was a 50% increase in the amount of time students were expected to complete homework between the years of 1997 and 2011 and it was forecasted that this increase would carry on due to technological advances allowing students to be able to complete more work. This trend seemed to have continued as daily homework is not seen as uncommon (Xu *et al.*, 2022). More recently, McJames, Parnell and O'Shea (2024) have championed daily homework using new technologies and how this can improve maths scores. However, there is an additional danger here on the mental health of students and their wellbeing due to "Overscheduling" (Brown *et al.*, 2011, p. 575) and students not having enough time in the working day to complete this work. Although student wellbeing

will be reviewed in the appropriate section later, it is a reasonable assumption that the reduction of free time and the ever-increasing demands of homework needed to be completed out of school hours will have a negative effect on student wellbeing (Singh and Gupta, 2025) . The demands on students to complete homework and how students are assigned “unprecedented hours of homework each night” (Sallee and Rigler, 2008, p. 46) needs to be investigated further.

In contrast, one of the earlier benefits of homework that was mentioned in the previous section was the interpersonal skills that students gain when receiving homework. It could be argued that if students believe homework takes too much time, then students could learn to be more efficient with their time and improve their organisation skills. Cooper (2007) is one researcher who states that homework can improve a range of non-academic qualities. These non-academic benefits include greater self-direction, self-discipline, time management, problem solving and independence. These are all admirable and indeed important traits to teach our young people, but we must question how often and how extensive the homework we set needs to be if we are to instil these attributes.

As mentioned earlier, students can spend upwards of three hours a night on homework. Questions need to be asked as to whether it is justifiable to set a student three hours of homework per day so that they can learn these skills of time management and organisation. Perhaps it is justifiable for those who succeed and improve these skills. However, for the ones who do not gain these skills the homework tasks set will surely feel more of a punishment and reinforce the negative stigmas associated with homework. SEND students might be particularly vulnerable to this, such as those with ADHD, for example (Langberg *et*

al., 2012). This research showed that those with ADHD can struggle with homework and need intervention and support with their organisation and planning skills. Langberg *et al.* (2012) discussed how parents can help support students develop these skills over time, highlighting the importance of routines, structured homework, and support in breaking tasks into manageable steps. Their findings emphasise that homework difficulties are not a matter of motivation, but are influenced by underlying cognitive challenges. As a result, students with additional needs may require sustained scaffolding both at home and in school. This needs to be considered when setting homework tasks for SEND students, and further consideration needs to be given in terms of how long it takes to complete these homework tasks.

One solution is perhaps teachers could spend time on creating homework assignments that suits the individual needs of their learners and this would make homework more beneficial for all students. Research on homework in inclusive classrooms shows that differentiated or adapted homework for those with additional SEND needs can improve engagement (Carr, 2013). Differentiated homework may involve adjusting the volume of work, providing scaffolded instructions, breaking tasks into smaller steps, or homework in a different way that is more accessible to the learner. Students with ADHD, for example, could benefit from shorter, highly structured tasks with clear steps alongside adult support (Power *et al.*, 2006). Teachers might also consider designing homework that reinforces mastery or consolidation of content rather than introducing new content, particularly for learners who struggle with working memory or processing demands. Such approaches not only reduce cognitive load but also help prevent the frustration, avoidance, and family stress that homework can generate for learners with additional needs (Katz, Alesi and Moè, 2022).

However, Rosário *et al.* (2015) shows us that teachers find this difficult to complete as they are not allocated enough time towards the planning of these assignments, especially when class sizes are growing and the diversity of students needs are increasing.

Family time and the subsequent effects homework has on parents is another area that should be considered when looking at the implications of homework. When students' complete homework and when staff spend time reviewing completed homework, the time taken to for this can come directly from family time. Parents can often complain about their children not having enough time to complete their homework and adding strain on the family (Cohen, Gershky and Davidov, 2024) . It was also noted that students sometimes do not have the skills or knowledge to complete the homework and parents felt that they needed to allocate additional time prior to the homework being completed on filling these knowledge and skills gaps. Furthermore, in some cases the parents found it more conducive to complete the homework quickly themselves and give it to their children to hand in due to not having enough time to teach new skills, knowledge, or even supervise their children during homework tasks. Although this was described as "overparenting" (Locke, Campbell and Kavanagh, 2012, p. 250) as parents stepped in and did more than what was reasoned as necessary, it does raise the question as to why students were given tasks for homework that took so much time that made parents feel they needed to contribute and support in such a manner. Perhaps educators need to be mindful about the realistic amount of time it takes to complete tasks and whether that is appropriate. Additionally, students could be questioned regarding what types of homework they cannot complete or do not understand so that these are eradicated before it develops to the stage where parents become overly involved and start completing a student's work. Fundamentally it is clear that family time

away from school work is important and that diminishing family time is an issue that needs to be addressed as this valuable time is important to the overall family unit's wellbeing (Bempechat *et al.*, 2011).

Students' experiences of homework vary, and research shows that these differences are closely tied to both students' socioeconomic backgrounds and their dispositions. Firstly, inequalities in home environments can influence students ability to complete homework, how they feel about homework and their academic abilities. These can be influenced by having limited by having less access to parental support with homework, a quiet space to complete homework, or having a lack of equipment or digital access to resources. Calarco, Horn and Chen (2022) review of homework inequities illustrates that children from low-income households often face barriers that make homework disproportionately difficult, leading to frustration and reduced confidence. Furthermore, this same research highlighted that teachers can sometimes overlook these difficulties and see a lack of homework completion or quality down to a lack of effort, as opposed to the barriers faced due to inequalities. These factors combined could amplify inequalities and reinforce them, resulting in student with greater resources and support completing homework, gaining better outcomes and having higher wellbeing, whereas students with lower resources resulting in the opposite. However, this complicated interaction between socioeconomic status, homework and achievement still needs further research (Cooper, Civey and Patall, 2006), and the link between this and wellbeing is still in its infancy.

For some families, homework can be a cause of significant stress and conflict (Gao *et al.*, 2025). Kathleen and Donald (2016) argue that more attention should be given towards the amount of time a homework task will take due to the negative feelings that can arise in the family. Some students think that homework can be a waste of their time, describing homework as “busywork” (Kathleen and Donald, 2016, p. 199), where the assignment has a lack of meaning or benefit. It is important that both parents and children see a benefit for the homework, otherwise the tasks set will be seen as a waste of time and homework will gain a negative stigma within the family household. Parents have stated that homework is an unfair elongation of the school day for their children, as well as an elongation of the working day for themselves (Hampshire, Butera and Hourcade, 2014).

Additionally, parents may work full time and come home to be given additional hours in their working day by a teacher to support their child. Reay (2006) discusses how some parents disengage completely with the education system due to the demands of homework being understood to be unreasonable and that they do not have the time to support their children, particularly with working class parents. Reay (2006) also goes on to say that this is not due to the negative stereotypes of working-class parents being lazy or showing a lack of interest or care towards their children, but because of the nature of their jobs meaning that they are too exhausted to help when they return home. The interviews and focus groups analysed showed that working class students felt that teachers were not understanding of these difficulties, and often looked down at them if they do not have a “posh accent” (Reay, 2006, p. 97). However, although hearing from working class students and understanding the inequalities they face, there is risk of not understanding how middle class and upper class

families face struggles, and a potential risk of believing that they do not experience their own difficulties in regard to homework.

Lareau (2003) noted that teachers complained about middle-class and upper-class parents' children not completing homework. When looking through transcripts, parents in professional jobs such as lawyers, managers and executives, often stated they were "too busy" (Lareau, 2003, p. 22). However, despite different professions and socioeconomic backgrounds facing similar difficulties with the amount of time they have to help support their children, they might be judged differently. Working class parents have been known to feel embarrassed from teachers' interactions with homework, and this can fuel disengagement and reduced contact and interaction with the school (Gillies, 2005).

However, it is unclear if middle-class parents also feel this same sense of alienation and if not, again highlights another factor that can increase inequalities between the socioeconomic groups in homework, attainment and wellbeing.

Hartas (2015) states that mothers are the family members who get burdened with homework in a traditional nuclear family as it is closely linked or associated with traditional childcare responsibilities. This burden is seen as overwhelming, especially in single parent families where the mother is the only parent or family member who is around in the working week to help a child with their homework. Due to this, before homework is even attempted it is seen in a negative light and purely an exercise to be completed as quickly as possible so that both parents and children can enjoy their time together after a hard day's work.

Although the quality of the homework has been questioned here by parents, we must consider the time it takes to complete the work in isolation to this. If the homework were

of good quality and benefited the child unquestionably, parents may still see it in a negative light due to the amount of time it takes them to support their child, particularly if they have a demanding job or a demanding day.

This demand is not limited to employment and there can be other demands on a child or a parent. Demand can involve the parents of the children themselves being a carer, for example (Aldridge and Becker, 2003). Firstly, parents who were carers that were highly stressed showed they had a poor parent-school relationship and communication and liaising with the school was a struggle during difficult times (Burke and Hodapp, 2014). Research showed that this extended to homework, and that schools are becoming better equipped to help support parents who are carers with the use of technology (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018). Example of this could be the use of online parents evenings or using of technology to communicate and issue homework as well as other important information.

Secondly, demands can also extend to carers that are the children and students themselves. Research by Sainsbury (2009) showed how carers who were at school had little time for school work, and some carers interviewed felt that schools were not understanding and that they even felt “punished” for being a carer (Sainsbury, 2009, p. 76). This is likely to extend to homework where teachers may not have been understanding of why they might not be able to complete homework and potentially issue sanctions for non-completion. When looking at young carers’ in secondary school, they are also unlikely to reach their ambitions and career goals and more likely to become NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) students (Moloney *et al.*, 2023). This is due to the heavy schedules they have where they struggle with school work, transportation to school and the caring duties they

carry out at home impacting their progress at school. This shows how this additional demand can impact students' wellbeing and their long-term goals.

However, an alternative view could be that some parents do not see the amount of homework and amount of time their children are spending completing their homework to be an issue. Some parents might encourage lots of homework for their children due to the possible rewards of increased opportunities that goes with academic achievement. Some parents want their children to have more homework and actively engage with school. Parents want to increase the homework they receive from teachers as they are focused on boosting their children's grades and unlocking prestigious post school opportunities for their children (Maltese, Tai and Fan, 2012). This pressure is significant in certain cultures, so much so that up to 50% of Japanese parents pay for additional lessons in maths so that their children can unlock opportunities (Trautwein and Köller, 2003). However, there is a sense that these demands for additional schoolwork and time for tuition outside of school hours originates from more affluent and academically focused families and cultures where the time from the parents is not directly taken up due to the payment of a private tutor or someone other than the parent supervising or aiding with the homework. Regardless, the views of the students who receive private tutoring as an extra out of school support would be of interest.

3.5 STRESS LEVELS AND SLEEPING BEHAVIOUR

Sleep emerged as a major concern in the pilot interviews. Some students reported routinely working until one or two in the morning, leaving them with only a few hours' sleep. Even if this happens intermittently, it is likely to harm their wellbeing, particularly when some of the tasks keeping them awake appear to offer limited educational value.

Stress was another clear theme. Students described receiving homework every day, often of the same type, which quickly became overwhelming. As one student explained, "you're given an essay every day... that would be stressful," highlighting how both frequency and repetition contributed to their sense of pressure.

The teacher interview reflected similar issues. Marking was described as "very intense," and additional stress arose from chasing incomplete homework. This created a situation where teachers experienced pressure whether students completed the work or not. These findings suggest a need to consider how the negative impacts of homework might be reduced for staff as well as students.

When looking through the literature surrounding the effects of homework on student wellbeing, some of the results are alarming and raise concerns. Students are under high pressure to do well in school that anxiety of students is at an all-time high and can even lead to drastic and suicidal thoughts for some students (Cho and Chan, 2020), and it is a concern that these thoughts have been amplified further from the pandemic (Brooks *et al.*, 2020) due to students having less support for their learning due to home based education during

this time. Additionally, students did not have as much academic support in school to help them when they struggled with their work. Without these key supportive mechanisms, it is a plausible explanation that the work students were doing at home caused anxiety if they were unable to access support for it. Some of the homework practices brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic are still being used in current teaching practices in the school that the research was conducted in , and these are still contributing to stresses for students today. A systematic literature review by Magalhães *et al.* (2020) displayed multiple studies that schools were heavily investing in technologies for online learning and setting homework virtually so that is appeared on Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) and on Smart phones. The literature here highlighted how there were negative results from these practices such as procrastination and physical fatigue. For example, students using technology such as tablets, phones and computers were able to procrastinate with other media due to the multidimensional nature of the technology. However, this review was conducted during the immediate period of COVID-19, and it is recommended that these technologies and their effects are reviewed again now that the pandemic ended a few years ago.

As previously stated, a significant proportion of the main research focuses on maths as a subject. This is likely due to government focus on the subject (Brown *et al.*, 2003), as well as international comparisons with other countries (Singapore, for example) that have significantly improved their nations maths ability while the UK has lagged behind (Simpson and Wang, 2023). The concern of being left behind in maths attainment is not unique to the United Kingdom, as comparison to other countries is felt by the United States also, who worry about being a “Nation At Risk” (Harris and Herrington, 2006, p. 209). However, countries that do well and are leading the international league tables, such as Singapore,

also have poor wellbeing and have students that experience “Test Anxiety” (Lowe and Ang, 2012, p. 107). A result of pushing maths results so high could indeed have a negative impact on wellbeing, and this must be recognised.

The literature review by Magalhães *et al.* (2020) also included other interesting findings and points which invite further investigation. This has been expanded outwards to STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths), but significantly overlooks key subjects such as languages, English and the social sciences. It is important that these subjects are researched so that a more comprehensive and representable analysis can be made on the effects of homework on wellbeing. However, the reason for the focus on STEM subjects is likely due to the nature of the tasks and homework being set online with these VLE technologies. A key finding from a teacher perspective was that teachers used VLEs to conduct tests and assignments that can be automatically marked by software used to set the homework. This was especially useful for teachers who had larger classes, where time marking the test increases per student and is therefore worth the investment in setting the tasks virtually in the first place. Teachers also found this useful in larger classes when students were absent as it saved administration time and tasks such as redistribution of homework as well as revisiting test papers to mark from later submissions from students. Arguably from this perspective, these technologies have improved staff and teacher wellbeing due to the time saved. However, STEM subjects are potentially easier to self-mark due to clear definitive answers compared to subjects like English, for example, where the software might struggle to mark and is more likely to require a teacher to assess the homework.

Another area of focus which arose from the literature review from Magalhães *et al.* (2020) was the need to conduct research over a more sustained period. Some of the studies included within the review were cross sectional and lasted for as few as four days . This snapshot might not be long enough to gain a full understanding of student and staff viewpoints on homework and does not allow enough time for either group to elaborate on their feelings of the issue (Creswell, 1998). Doing so allows participants time to open up and researchers gain deeper meaning from this extended time period (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2011). Hammersley (2006) goes on to say that a good ethnography should involve being part of the community for at least a year, with the thesis research being conducted beyond a year. The thesis ethnography aimed to gain more insightful views due to the research being embedded in the school and allowing time for students and staff to expand and elaborate on their views. Gaining visual data such as photographs is also a good ethnographic method that can allow further insight (Pink, 2016).

A final issue to re-examine is the focus on these technologies from a teaching and learning perspective, as opposed to being open to student practices being good for their mental wellbeing. Teachers were worried about students trying tasks multiple times and gaining higher scores that were then an inaccurate way of assessing students. However, the effects of this can have benefits on student wellbeing that are overlooked. A student who does poorly on virtual homework or assessment quizzes and resubmits may have positive effects that are far more important and beneficial (Bonham, Deardorff and Beichner, 2003). From a teaching and learning perspective, a student is self-reflecting and resubmitting work again on an area that they are weak at. Bonham, Deardorff and Beichner (2003) illustrates this point further by stating that “Web-based homework provides immediate feedback, which

could help keep students from practicing incorrect methods” (Bonham, Deardorff and Beichner, 2003, p. 1051) . However, it is arguably more importantly for a student to improve their score and then subsequently improve their self-esteem which might have been damaged from the initial homework grading in the first instance. Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) explains that assessments can have a negative impact on a students’ self-esteem, but this can be avoided by allowing students to resubmit, or by giving automated testing with instant feedback. A student that is given an assessment for homework could keep a positive self-esteem by allowing them to resubmit online. This digital based homework can also have improvements achievement compared to paper based homework (Mestre, Hart and Dufresne, 2002) , although wellbeing was not considered. This alternative perspective reinforces that existing research is heavily centred on grades and attainment and therefore highlights the need for studies that prioritise students’ wellbeing.

Furthermore, homework causes stress and anxiety to students when they have to spend excessive amounts of time completing it which takes time away from other leisurely activities (Jiri, 2009). If students want to take part in extracurricular activities, students will need to complete work at a later time or choose and prioritise which one they wish to complete. It is worth noting that some extracurricular activities will actively reduce stress levels, and replacing this stress-coping strategy with a direct source of stress such as homework is a double disadvantage to the student. Galloway, Conner and Pope (2013) found that students who complete more homework have greater behavioural engagement in school, but they experienced more academic stress, physical health problems and a lack of balance in their lives. These physical health problems might be linked to the students not having time to take part in extra activities outside of school that might have benefited their

health. One study even showed that students were happy to sacrifice their health in order to complete homework and maintain their grades within school (Tonso *et al.*, 2002). In this research, students were seen to be “doing school” and were completing tasks in a shallow way and avoiding deep learning. Students were merely completing tasks and willing to sacrifice physical health to maintain their academic status within school and to not be highlighted as a student who does not hand in work.

Fear of failure and the struggle to maintain academic levels and status at school is a common theme which arises within the literature. As stated before, cross sectional research and quantitative measures using surveys and questionnaires have been the dominant methodology used in this area, however, there have been some enlightening results from the use of homework diaries . Homework diaries were used by Kouzma and Kennedy (2002) which showed the variation between students in the amount of homework they had to complete and the psychological effects it had on them. Within these diaries, the amount of time spent on homework ranged between 10 and 65 hours per week, and a significant positive correlation was found between the time students spent on this work and their reported stress levels. Senior high school had the highest levels of stress and were seen as more emotionally taxing compared to younger ages and earlier years in high school. Some of the psychological effects reported were feelings of depression, dejection, tension, anxiety, and hostility. Despite this, the findings within this weeklong research shows some of the psychological burden which students carry, particularly in older year groups that have additional pressures such as exams.

This was further reinforced by a later study conducted by the same research team (Kouzma and Kennedy, 2004) that showed that exams and outcomes were the most stressful, and homework focusing on these key points in time contributed towards this. Students felt overwhelmed as they had too much to do and too much to learn outside of school time. Students also found that timing of assignments and the lack of spacing between the assignments of different subjects contributed to their stress levels also. Interestingly, a cause of stress for some students was not the type of homework or the tasks given to them when the homework was allocated. Students reported experiencing an excessive workload, particularly during exam periods, which contributed to increased anxiety (Nordmo & Samara, 2009). One student in particular said that they had to complete “1000 pages of reading material” (Nordmo and Samara, 2009, p. 258), which highlights how much students felt they had to do outside of lessons. This anxiety was higher still when students felt that they received little feedback when they had spent so much time completing their homework. These findings highlight the need for further qualitative research into how students experience the demands placed on them, including homework and independent study.

Lots of work allocated during exam periods in particular appeared to be a common cause of anxiety for students, especially when they were given so much and they received little feedback prior to their exams (Nordmo and Samara, 2009). These findings are invaluable and qualitative research is needed to gain further insights into feelings of students of the impact of homework.

It is worth noting that some students might not find homework stressful, and the homework itself can have a positive impact on a student's wellbeing. For example, Probst (2019) states that homework can improve student self-esteem and confidence in their abilities. However, as identified earlier, Probst (2019) warns that too much homework can reverse these effects and that it is crucial that students are allowed sufficient time to be able to take part in these extra-curricular activities, relax and have ample sleep. It is worth noting that although Probst (2019) champions homework for the positive effects it has on students' self-esteem, it can also do the opposite. Some students who do not do well at homework can be given a negative self-perception and add psychological strain to the child (Fumarco and Schultze, 2020). Students who are doing well academically at school do not feel this strain and feel positively about homework, however, less able students or students who are not doing so well in school feel greater pressure with homework and have higher anxiety levels towards it. Furthermore, Fumarco and Schultze (2020) found a negative correlation between the amount of homework a student was given and physical exercise, and students with a lower self-perceived academic performance were impacted more by this. This also led to students not using their time effectively and playing video games as opposed to doing their homework and weaker students procrastinating more. There is a fine balance between giving students enough homework to improve their schoolwork, but also not giving too much that they have too little time to do anything else, as well as making sure that students do not feel overwhelmed by receiving too much homework.

This fine balance between students' homework and their personal time for leisure or sleep is not being achieved when reviewing the research. As stated earlier, students spend on average 3.1 hours a night on homework, and this homework is stated to be the primary

stressor for students when they were asked (Galloway, Conner and Pope, 2013). This has led to students experiencing “overscheduling” (Brown *et al.*, 2011, p. 575) where students do not have enough time in the normal working day to complete their work and have any meaningful leisure time before they sleep. The pilot study findings would agree with this as students frequently said that they would have to stay up late to experience any sort of leisure time, and that results in sleep loss. Parents have also been conscious that their children might have to choose between completing homework or taking part in leisure activities, and have taken matters into their own hands by completing their child’s homework (Locke, Campbell and Kavanagh, 2012) as they want their child to have a sense of childhood. Parents do not want to see their children experiencing stress by how much homework they need to do, and want the family home to be an area of respite where their children can relax and not feel burdened with extra work (Hampshire, Butera and Hourcade, 2014). Homework also caused a stressful atmosphere at home with arguments often experienced regarding when, how and whether their children should even do the homework (Trautwein *et al.*, 2006a). Parents have reported that they experience more stress and strain within the family home on days where homework is given to their child (Moè *et al.*, 2020). Parents are the ones that supervise, create rules at home surrounding homework, provide encouragement and stop leisure time. Therefore, even parents experience the negative psychological effects of homework and have reported feeling less energetic, a lack of control, along with feelings of helplessness and alienation (Moè *et al.*, 2020) .

Parents often feel incompetent when the homework set is in a subject that they are not familiar with and this can result in the parent feeling pressure . A useful illustration of how parents feel via this research is shown overleaf in Figure 2., with parents feeling a need for

support practices (Moè *et al.*, 2020). The negative effects of homework on the family as well as the student who have been set the homework is cited by Hartas (2015, p. 610) , as the “Spill Over Hypothesis”, where negative effects of homework felt by the child can also carry over to parents who have to supervise and help with homework. Huth-Bocks *et al.* (2004) also found that the strain is felt especially by working mothers as they are usually seen as the ones to help the children cope and provide them with support. Consequently, the homework here has led to a negative atmosphere in the family home and likely a negative effect on the family’s wellbeing as a whole, including and going beyond the student who was first allocated and set the homework. It is reasonable to see that some single pieces of homework can damage student wellbeing on multiple fronts. Firstly, the piece of work has a negative impact on themselves initially for not being equipped with enough time to complete it, then also potentially feelings of anxiety towards the piece itself, and lastly there occur negative feelings within the family environment and nuclear unit itself for the upset, disturbance and constraints it might require.

Figure 2: Illustration of conflict between parent and child with homework completion (Moè et al., 2020, p. 6)

Homework planning



Multiple theories that can help explain their reciprocal relationship here between parents and children in regards to homework. Bandura (1986) explains Social Learning Theory, where children are more likely to copy and imitate role models such as their parents. Furthermore, the concept of reciprocal determinism helps explain how parent–child homework interactions become mutually reinforcing and can add context to the illustration presented in Figure 2 above by Moè *et al.* (2020). Parents' negative emotional reaction towards homework influences their children's behaviour, which in turn shapes parental reactions, creating a cyclical pattern of stress or support during homework.

An additional theory that can be applied to the relationship between parent and child with homework is that of Deci and Ryan (2000), and their Self-Determination Theory. Self-Determination Theory proposes that children have a psychological need for autonomy, and that social contexts which threaten this need tends to elicit defensive reactions. These reactions consequently shape how adults respond to the child, creating a transactional pattern in tension and pressure can increase between parent and child. Although SDT does not address homework directly, it is a well-suited theory that can help explain some of the tension that can arise between parents and children. Parents who support their children with homework in ways that reduce or threaten their autonomy are more likely to create tension and strain within the parent–child relationship (Katz, Kaplan and Buzukashvily, 2011).

Recent evidence highlights the relationship between homework load, late bedtimes, and sleep deprivation among adolescents. Yu *et al.* (2023) found that homework was a major contributor to delayed bedtimes, with 44–55% of younger secondary students and 40–90%

of older students going to sleep later because of homework demands. Using less than eight hours of sleep as the threshold for deprivation, the study showed that a substantial proportion of students were completing homework after 9pm—24% of sixth graders and 77% of ninth graders—with some working past midnight. These patterns are particularly concerning given that adolescence is a critical period for stabilising circadian rhythms. The study also noted that students who shift towards an evening chronotype are more vulnerable to emotional stress and neurological changes, which can manifest as internalising symptoms (e.g., anxiety, depression, somatic complaints) and externalising behaviours (e.g., aggression, delinquency). Yu *et al.* (2023) argue that the combined effects of excessive homework, insufficient sleep, and academic stress remain under-researched, despite clear indications that these factors interact to undermine young people’s wellbeing. This study is particularly significant because it provides recent, large-scale evidence linking homework practices to measurable physiological and psychological risks during a sensitive developmental period, making it a crucial contribution to contemporary debates about homework and adolescent wellbeing.

This is an area that research should aim to investigate from a student perspective and allow students to openly discuss and divulge their concerns. Although this research was conducted in China, and discusses how the Ministry of Education of China has implemented a “Double Reduction” policy (reducing the amount of homework given and the amount of time private tutors see children after school), a parallel can be seen with current students within the UK who are having to “Catch up” due to COVID. It is important to ascertain

students' views on the effects homework has had on them and if it has indeed increased within our own education system.

The effects of homework on sleep deprivation cited in this chapter are arguably universal in their nature around the time of puberty (DeSilva Mousseau *et al.*, 2016). During puberty, an individual's body clock naturally changes and they tend to stay awake more at night and sleep longer in the morning. Unfortunately, the issue of lack of sleep is compounded further when the biological changes in circadian rhythms combine with the environmental needs to complete homework by a certain deadline. DeSilva Mousseau *et al.* (2016) reports how students tried to "catch up" their lack of sleep by sleeping more on the weekend, however, this makes them experience tiredness and exhaustion worse by constantly changing their sleep cycles and rhythms. Concerns are these practices will become embedded and carry on into adulthood, and that a student's sleep behaviours are disrupted throughout the year and not just in exam periods as stated earlier by (Nordmo and Samara, 2009). Poor sleep patterns resulting from high homework workload may continue into adulthood and go beyond the shorter period of acute stress.

Another study has displayed the negative effects of homework on sleep. Yeo *et al.* (2020) conducted cross sectional research with eight schools and found that students who were receiving more than five hours of homework or independent study were more likely to experience anhedonia (inability to feel pleasure in activities which would normally feel pleasurable) and anxiety. Reducing workload is a key priority to improving mental health and mental wellbeing. As highlighted earlier with sleep, Yeo *et al.* (2020) also displayed that too much homework can lead to a delay in circadian rhythms and led to a slower build-up of

homeostatic sleep pressure (the biological drive and need to sleep, which increases the longer you stay awake) . Waking up early to complete homework before school starts also curtail students' nocturnal sleep. Students who had more than 5 hours of homework spent 35 minutes less time in bed during the week compared to students who had 3 hours of homework. This disturbance towards sleep increased further on the weekends where the same group showed a 60-minute decrease in time spent in bed. Students with more homework also displayed poorer sleep-hygiene practices such as more time with media while in their bed. Concerningly, when asked why they went to bed, students who had more than 5 hours of homework stated they went to bed because they "finished their homework" compared to students with less homework who stated they went to bed because they felt "Tired" or "Sleepy". Students with more homework ignored their biological instincts and need for sleep due to the external pressures placed upon them.

Additionally, an indirect relationship was found between the amount of time spent on homework and depression score, and this was mediated by reduced time in bed for sleep. Adolescents did not have enough time in the day to complete their work, fit in family and social obligations, extracurricular activities and sleep sufficiently. It is often sleep that is sacrificed in Confucian-heritage cultures in order to accommodate the demands from homework. Although the sample in this thesis is not embedded in a Confucian-heritage context, similar behaviours were evident in the pilot study, with students reporting delayed bedtimes, sacrificing sleep to meet homework deadlines, and experiencing heightened stress as a result.

Research has shown various negative physical and psychological effects of homework. Galloway and Pope (2008) has shown that students can have a fear of failure and test anxiety, with 67% of students stating that homework and tests were the biggest stressor in their lives. In extreme cases, some students only had 3 hours of sleep per night and had to drop out of school activities. 77% of students reported stress related physical illness and 50% reported difficulty sleeping and exhaustion. It was also shown that some children experienced a longer working day than adults, and they experienced physical problems such as weight gain and/or loss, headaches, stomach problems and other mental health problems. Students were described as living in fear of missing deadlines for homework, with 48% of students averaging a C-grade and reporting feeling stressed “all or most of the time” (Ward, 2021b, p. 2; Ward, 2021a) and experiencing chronic sleep deprivation. Research has also shown that it is the quality and quantity of sleep that is affected (Holland *et al.*, 2021), with students reporting anxiety and feeling overwhelmed by homework, and 25% of students feeling bored and frustrated by homework in general. Reports of anxiety and academic stress is a frequently cited concern with homework and homework anxiety is a unique cognitive concern (Wu *et al.*, 2023). Due to the amount of homework and stress caused by homework, comfort eating and lack of exercise is an indirect consequence also (Fu *et al.*, 2022). Extremely concerning was the effects of homework and anxiety on Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviours (STB). Sleep deprivation due to high workload increased students experience of STB (Flores *et al.*, 2022). Students who had 4 hours of sleep were at a significantly higher risk of STB than those students who had 8 hours of sleep per night. The impact of sleep deprivation extended to ideation of STB as well as attempts.

Homework itself is often viewed as something to be feared. Curson, Wilson-Smith and Holliman (2019) found that secondary school students feared their transition from primary school due to the amount of homework they would foresee them having to do in secondary school. Students reportedly felt anxious about becoming students in their new school due to the social norms of secondary school students having extra homework to do compared to what they were previously given in primary school. Notably, these anxieties towards homework still existed after they made the transition to secondary school showing it was not due to false preconceptions of secondary school life, but their anxieties towards homework having been confirmed. Furthermore, students appeared to be completing homework due to fear of consequences of not completing it rather than the benefits of the task itself (Gelen, 2020). Students often feel fear of not completing it and being given even more homework and then the amount they must complete becomes larger and more burdensome. These findings are similar since the Covid-19 pandemic, with 47% of students experiencing school-work related stress and struggling with completing online school work (Lehmann et al., 2024) . Furthermore, similar stresses during the pandemic and school work were related to students having to adopt a “self-directed learning style and lack of support” (Whyte et al., 2024, p. 2). This seems to be almost normalised, as students continue to report the same concerns about the volume of homework and its impact on their free time post-Covid as they did pre-Covid (Zeedyk et al., 2003).

Homework has a wide range of effects psychologically and physically. Further research needs to be conducted to gain a deeper insight as to the types of homework that would have improved or detrimental impacts for both teachers and students. This needs to be obtained from the students in an open dialogue so that they can be at the centre to explain and

influence homework practices of schools and teachers. Some of the effects above are disturbing and require a prime focus and deeper research. The focus has primarily been on students and attainment, and limited research thereafter has been on student mental wellbeing. What has become quite apparent is the even smaller focus on teacher wellbeing and how homework practice affects them. A possible reason for this limited focus is that teachers might not remain in the profession if they experience some of the symptoms as outlined above for students, whereas students often do not have this option; they must remain in compulsory education and subsequently can be viewed as having little choice with regard to the stresses they experience.

3.6 POLICY

The final category that was identified after the pilot study was that of “Policy”. In this section national policies and individual school policies will be considered. As “Homework policies are frequently interpreted loosely by teachers” (Hallam, 2004, p. 34), national policies and explicit policies such as no homework policies from around the world will be explored. There are no national policies for homework in the UK, and “there is no universal system or rule regarding homework; consequently, homework practices reflect individual teacher beliefs and school philosophies.” (Holland *et al.*, 2021, p. 635).

The pilot study held similarities between staff and students with regard to policy being a burden and dictating how homework was set, marked and monitored. There was a link to the earlier section in the “Purpose” of homework as it was viewed that the staff member and the students were set and/or had to do homework that was pointless due to trying to conform and abide by a policy that imposed the homework onto the students. Both staff

and students' perspective with regards to homework was that it had been set due to a policy set by Senior Management in the school, and this was monitored via lesson observations and book scrutinies. This consequently led to homework being set, marked, and displayed as proof to senior management and at times, "Pointless" homework was set so that staff and students looked to be following the policy correctly. In the cases in the pilot study, this was the primary point in setting homework, as opposed to aid learning or retention. For example, when interviewing a member of staff in the pilot study, they stated that:

"My mark book will look empty. So, the way I overcome that is by doing lots of small questions for homework and putting that in my mark book to make it look, like, fuller."

As can be inferred by the statement above, the fear was the view that not enough homework had been set and/or marked, so the member of staff set extra work when they knew they were going to be observed. The primary purpose of this was not to gain extra insight into the progress of the students, or even to give additional feedback. The main objective here was to make sure they had enough homework set so that it gave the appearance that they had been following the school's marking policy closely. This view is reinforced from the student perspective also, where a student in the pilot study stated:

"where a teacher right before this, she displays and gets us to write a lot of notes for homework. She'd never look at those notes... we just put them down just for the sake of like when SLT start to look at these books."

Both quotes imply that there is a clear disparity between what teachers want to do with regards to when or even if they set homework, and the policy which directs when they should do so. This suggests more exploration of homework "Policy" is needed, including

exploration of who creates the policies, why schools have homework policies and whether they are needed.

Firstly, it is worth noting that more schools in the modern era (especially post COVID-19) are looking at more international techniques of teaching and learning than before. Globalisation and multi-national influences are becoming more dominant on local and national policy making (Rizvi and Lingard, 2009). Therefore, looking at local and institution specific homework policy is just as important as looking at international policies which may be readily adopted.

What is likely to be universally true is that teachers and schools themselves are under increasing pressure to perform well and to have increased results (Jerrim, Allen and Sims, 2024). Teachers themselves are constantly reflecting on their own performance with what is known as the “internalising gaze” (Perryman *et al.*, 2017, p. 747). This pressure and competition between schools happens locally with league tables and OFSTED reports, as well as internationally with league tables such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment). This pressure at a personal level (teacher level), local (school) and international (government) has all led and contributed significantly towards homework being a method to increasing student grades and scores. This might explain why certain subjects set more homework than others. For example, students receive more maths homework than any other subject (Xu *et al.*, 2022). Maths is clearly a significant and prioritised subject in many schools and countries, with Britain emphasising a double weighting in maths GCSE compared to other subjects. In England, this is reinforced by the school accountability system, where maths is “double-weighted” in the Progress 8 and

Attainment 8 measures, meaning that a pupil's maths GCSE grade counts twice towards the school's performance score, compared to other subjects such as science or geography, for example (Perry, 2016). It is this pressure, high value and high stakes that might have contributed to so much homework being set. Xu *et al.* (2022) did however state that there might be ways to reduce homework or make it more efficiently set so that the amount set from teachers and received by students is lowered. However, current teacher training programmes and professional development is heavily, if not exclusively, designed and focused on classroom practices such as lesson planning and assessment, and neglects homework planning and feedback sessions (Department for Education, 2019). Furthermore, (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2001) explain that creating homework pieces are complicated and they need skills and knowledge to make them effective. Training sessions for new teachers is vital, especially with the rapid advancement of technology and the diverse uses in technology in home learning since COVID-19. However, this research reflects a familiar limitation in the wider homework literature, specifically the over-reliance on mathematics as the main study being focused upon. This narrows the extent to which findings can be applied across subjects. In this instance, though, the focus on mathematics is understandable, given the disproportionate emphasis placed on the subject within league tables and the wider accountability system.

The clear need for trainee teachers to be trained on how to implement and apply homework policies is further displayed by Holland *et al.* (2021). Holland *et al.* (2021) champion homework as a key tool in a teacher toolbox yet show that only 12% of teachers are trained or discuss homework design or implementation as part of their training course. Despite the 28 teachers surveyed in the research, Holland *et al.* (2021) reveals a potential gap within

teacher training . When qualified, only 1 in 300 teachers went on a course with the focus being on homework, displaying the lack of training teachers are given on this tool. This lack of training is plausible as there is surprisingly very little research into different homework policies in schools (Vandenbussche, Griffiths and Scherrer, 2014), and this may contribute to the limited emphasis on homework within teacher-training programmes . Cooper, Civey and Patall (2006) also note that teachers frequently report having little guidance in how to design effective homework tasks, which impacts early-career teachers more than those with years of classroom experience.

When reviewing schools and homework policies, there seemed to be no universal rule or policy regarding homework, and it was actually left up to the teacher's discretion or it was down to the school's policy and/or philosophy. An observation made by Holland *et al.* (2021) was that despite education having changes to policies, practices, and qualifications, homework policy has comparatively been an under-developed area within education. Consequently, this has led to mass variation of homework policy between and within schools. Few schools provide specific homework guidelines and best practice. For the schools that do stipulate how homework should be implemented, it is rare that these policies are influenced and designed with research results. These schools' policies are often vague in their terminology regarding how to set homework, as well as quantity and quality of homework type.

Some schools do not have a homework policy, and this can be by accident or by design.

When surveyed, 2 of the 6 schools that were surveyed had a homework policy (Holland *et al.*, 2021). Almost half the teachers in the survey were not aware of whether the school had

a homework policy or stated that there was not a homework policy. More than half the parents did not know whether their child's school had a homework policy also. This leads to significant and major variation between schools, as well as within schools and by individual teachers. Of all homework set, the only consistency that could be seen was time spent reading and a set book given to children to read based on their reading age. However, this is widely a primary school level strategy, which further displays the lack of consistency at a secondary school or college level. This major inconsistency and absence of knowledge about homework policy is alarming as it leads to dramatic inconsistencies or practice. The potential detrimental effects of homework policies might include students being given homework that is needless and pointless, with only negative physical and psychological effects. Holland *et al.* (2021) concludes with some clear suggestions that should be universal when creating a homework policy and deciding how much and what type of homework to give students. Homework policies should focus on three key principles. Holland *et al.* (2021) argue that effective homework policies should advance the spirit of learning, be student-directed, and promote a balanced schedule.

These principles seem reasonable and logical and would certainly alleviate some of the issues outlined earlier in the literature review. Issues related to sleep, physical wellbeing, psychological wellbeing and time spent working would be reduced and remedied with this approach. However, for this to be successful, clearer policies are needed and these policies and the rationale for them need to be communicated and consistently applied with staff and governing bodies in schools.

DeSilva Mousseau *et al.* (2016) also suggests that policies need to be reviewed regarding homework. It is suggested that there needs to be policies put in place to limit the amount of homework given to students, ring-fence extra-curricular involvement, and references the American Academy of Paediatrics to limit school starting at 8:30am at the earliest. A further suggestion is that if a school is going to set homework or extra work outside of classroom hours, then it should be policy that schools must teach students how to manage this workload. It is deemed inappropriate to give students work outside of home to do without giving guidance or support in how to complete the work and achieve the set goals. This should also be extended to the need to allow time for students to complete assignments and space them out so that students do not experience any additional stress, or overload teachers with high pressure points in marking multiple class assignments (Pascoe, Hetrick and Parker, 2020) .

Notably, there are countries that have a different perspective on homework and set a national homework policy or guideline. Due to the negative connotations of homework already mentioned so far in this literature review, China has introduced a “Double Reduction Policy” (Zhang, Xiao and Fu, 2023). It has committed to streamlining homework so that the amount of time spent by the student completing it is reduced, the amount of time marking it by teachers is reduced, and the psychological stressors related to it are also reduced. Smart homework uses an interaction of various technologies such as “optical scanning identification, dot matrix code, structured knowledge graph, cloud question bank, artificial intelligence engine, big data analysis, and other technologies” (Zhang, Xiao and Fu, 2023, p. 2). This means that students are gaining valuable feedback and are directed and tutored in areas they are weaker at, allowing the homework to be purposeful and manageable.

Additionally, teachers do little marking but will get accurate feedback and allow them to tailor their lesson to their student's needs. Both stakeholders spend reduced time on homework and gain positive and useful feedback, which consequently has potential to have an improvement on student and staff wellbeing. However, this new technology is still in its early stages being used nationally and there are issues that have been identified. Despite lots of positive feedback and potential, there are worries that students might become too dependent on these systems and lose independence. Additionally, large proportions of students complain that screen sizes of phones and tablets are too small to complete homework properly. Also, a significant correlation was found between time spent on the devices or apps for homework contributed to anxiety ($P < 0.001$, very low risk of a type II error). An extension to this policy might be needed where students are capped to the amount of time they can spend on the apps or devices.

However, it is hard to keep policies up to date and with the pace of the technological revolution with homework devices being used since COVID-19 forced such a shift with e-learning and online homework. Policymakers who have been creating homework policies are having to adapt to issues identified quickly and these alterations are often lagging.

Although the use of apps and online learning create key pedagogical characteristics such as authenticity, personalisation, and collaboration (Yates *et al.*, 2021).

Another country that has introduced a significantly large-scale homework policy nationwide is Norway. In opposition to China's Double Reduction Policy, Norway seeks to allow more time for homework to be completed and embed it thoroughly into its curriculum (Hu and Huang, 2021). The "Homework Assistance Policy" was a success in primary schools in 2010,

and was later extended to secondary schools in 2014. The aim of this policy was to reduce social inequalities in gender, ethnicity, class and cultural backgrounds by allowing extra time at the end of the school day so that students can have a constructive environment to complete their homework and ask for specialist support from staff. This would allow students to have the ability to complete their homework in an environment and an adult to support them, which they may not have had available in their homes. This is quite an understandable or tolerant approach compared to other countries such as Canada where they have implemented a “Homework Engagement Policy” where parents are expected to take part in helping their children complete homework despite their personal circumstances (Hillier, Milne and Aurini, 2019), which can lead to conflict and disputes when parents are unable to engage with their child’s homework. The “Homework Assistance Policy” is completely optional and voluntary for students to attend. These attributes would help create a supportive psychological environment that enables students to complete their homework and may also contribute to improved wellbeing by reducing homework-related anxiety . However, this policy has been met with criticism as being somewhat idealistic. When reviewing who supports the students in the after school sessions, only 11% had some “pedagogical competence”, or education experience (Hu and Huang, 2021). Furthermore, 55% of the schools employed adults with no teaching experience. Although lack of teaching experience does not necessarily mean limited effectiveness, the wider literature suggests that homework support is most successful when adults receive clear guidance and training pedagogy (Voorhis, 2011). This raises questions about whether the policy is sufficiently resourced to ensure high-quality academic support. Clearly this policy needs to have the appropriate staff to make it a success, however, school budgets might be a reason why

teachers are not deployed to this initiative. When looking at the outcomes of the policy further, it seemed that African and Asian students used the service more than other demographics, which is a positive as this is the targeted demographic. However, it promoted larger gaps in achievement between SEN (Special Education Needs) and non-SEN students.

A possible explanation for the widening gap between SEND and non-SEND students lies in the type and quality of support offered within the homework-assistance policy. Norwich and Lewis (2007) demonstrate that learners with difficulties require what they term “high-density” (Norwich and Lewis, 2007, p. 132) teaching. This includes giving more explicit instruction, smaller learning steps, and effective feedback. Generic homework sessions, particularly those staffed by adults without specialist training, are unlikely to provide this level of structured support. Furthermore, Florian and Spratt (2013) show that this requires pedagogical and professional knowledge of SEND that parents, carers, and other non-specialist adults may not possess. As a result, SEND learners may not have been able to access support that was genuinely responsive to their needs when completing homework. Understanding these needs and putting scaffolding into place is important to close the gap between SEND and non-SEND (Voorhis, 2011). These studies suggest that while the policy may have increased access for some groups, the lack of training by the adults assisting the homework may have possibly failed to reduce the gap between SEND and non-SEND.

If a policy like this was to be adopted into the UK, it would need refining to prevent extending gaps in some key groups.

An alternative viewpoint to homework is that of a “No Excuse” homework policy, where homework is expected to be completed and to be done to a very high standard. As the title explains, there are no excuses for not completing homework and not completing it usually results in a harsh punishment. One research by Watkins and Stevens (2013) view this policy as also extended to staff so that they also share responsibility and take accountability for incomplete homework. Before the policy was implemented, homework was of low quality, disjointed and there was little expectation for any progression. However, by placing greater emphasis on the design and purpose of homework for both staff and students, uptake increased and this was associated with improved outcomes . Teachers were notably more positive about homework and this impacted on their wellbeing by not having to chase after as many students who did not complete their homework as students were more engaged in their home learning. This was aided by the school policy ringfencing an hour after school for intervention and follow up also. This homework policy had a clear impact on staff and students, and likely their long-term wellbeing in terms of grades and destinations post school. However, students’ views from those who did indeed struggle to complete homework, due to circumstance or ability, might have been neglected. As mentioned earlier, some students might not be able to complete work for a variety of reasons or circumstances out of their control. It is likely that the No Excuse Policy has added extra pressures on them, and that this should be explored further. Additionally, there has been a greater focus on the quality of homework and its benefits, therefore, it would be worthwhile exploring the types of assignments and homework given to students.

In contrast to the above study, some schools have adopted “No Homework” policies. Lumbani et al. (2021) found that students were supportive of this approach, reporting that it

created space for “me time” and reduced feelings of pressure. Lumbu-ani et al. (2021) suggested that the additional time after school enabled some students to engage in activities of their choosing, which may have contributed to improved wellbeing. However, other factors need to be considered as the additional free time might lead to engaging in activities that might decrease wellbeing. Increased discretionary time does not guarantee participation in enriching extracurricular activities, for example. For some students it may instead lead to greater screen, procrastination use or other sedentary behaviours, which have been associated with lower wellbeing in adolescence (Twenge and Campbell, 2018). Furthermore, access to extracurricular opportunities is influenced by socioeconomic factors, family responsibilities, and individual preferences (Covay and Carbonaro, 2010). Therefore, while the “No Homework” policy was experienced as lowering stress, its impact on wellbeing is likely to be mediated by a range of contextual factors.

Teaching staff also reported an improvement in wellbeing due to not having to check if students had completed work (Lumbu-ani *et al.*, 2021). This resulted in less marking, and crucially, fewer conflicts arising in the classroom due to sanctions surrounding homework. It is worth noting that although students were significantly in favour of this policy, there is a more diverse range of opinions in the staff body for this research. There were pockets of staff who disagreed with the policy as it allowed students to procrastinate at home and missed opportunities for students to catch up on work. Parental views were not taken in this research, but it would have been interesting to consider what their views on the policy were and whether they were supportive or against the policy. Additionally, a focus on

students with exams and their views on a No Homework Policy would be insightful, as perhaps this might have led to higher stress or anxiety due to them feeling less supported or a lack of guidance. When interviewing parents about no homework policies, only 10% were against a no homework policy (Pfeiffer, 2018) as they wanted their children to experience less anxiety and allow them more time for extracurricular activities.

As stated in the research above, it can be mixed; with some teachers enjoying no homework policies due to less marking and follow up administration. However, other teachers want to give homework for academic reasons such as consolidation, practice and preparation, and non-academic such as personal organisation, improved student interpersonal qualities and to stop procrastination. What is apparent though is that teachers all feel frustration when students do not complete homework as it leads to substantial follow up administration (Trautwein *et al.*, 2006b). Research suggests that teachers often experience frustration or concern when students do not complete homework. This could be due to a lack of homework completion disrupting lesson planning or assessments. Studies examining teacher views on homework have frequently cited worries on workload and pressure (Cooper, Civey and Patall, 2006). This might be due to the need to follow up with detentions or any other sanction or follow up as is per the policy within the school. It seems clear that teachers' views on homework policies is clearly under researched, possibly more than student views. When interviewing teachers, they cited that a lack of time to plan homework that meets all their students' needs was a major issue, and teaching multiple classes only exacerbates the problem (Rosário *et al.*, 2015). Future recommendations were to interview teachers on homework tasks that they give, the rationale behind them and to make sure that teachers understand the policy on homework in their own schools. Further

recommendations of Rosário *et al.* (2015) research was to also suggest SLT or school administrators within schools reflect on their own homework policies and to make sure staff understood these policies. This lack of understanding of homework policy might also explain discontent by parents who also complain about the amount of homework that their children receive (Núñez *et al.*, 2015a). Parents can often complain not only about the quantity of homework their child is given, but regarding the quality as well. This seems understandable if teachers themselves do not understand the policy within their school regarding homework and end up setting too much. Furthermore, as discussed, if teachers are not planning homework appropriately, then this might also result in substandard homework which is too easy or too difficult and can subsequently add to further frustration or apathy. Teachers who are in charge of their curriculum areas (such as Heads of Department or Faculty) are also unsure of their homework policies or believe that they are too generic also (Pfeiffer, 2018). This is a concern due to the hierarchical system in place within schools as it can have a direct impact on multiple teachers; teachers who are both experienced and new to teaching may not receive the correct guidance regarding the expectations, delivery and true value of homework.

A recurring limitation in the homework literature is that studies do not triangulate multiple stakeholders within their research. For example, triangulation between students, teachers at various levels, parents, carers or teaching assistants. Much of the empirical work relies either on student self-report or on teacher perceptions, with less attention given to parents, carers, or support staff such as teaching assistants. This lack of triangulation means that we cannot be certain about the impact of homework on wellbeing as we are unable to see consistency between these key groups. Cooper, Civey and Patall (2006) noted that parental

perspectives are often absent from homework research, for example. When looking at research that does have more than one these key groups, studies show that there can be inconsistencies between what they report. For example, (Dettmers, Trautwein and Lüdtke, 2009) show that students and parents often hold contrasting views about homework load and its impact. Xu (2011) also highlighted that parents' experiences were not captured consistently despite them being involved in helping their children complete homework. Finally, a 30 year meta analysis of homework for maths and science included no research with carers of teaching assistants (Fan *et al.*, 2017), displaying a further lack of triangulation. The limited inclusion of carers, parents, students and teachers within the same study is likely to reflect a range of practical constraints. Carers can be difficult to reach, and may have only short-term involvement with the young people in their care. Teaching assistants, meanwhile, are mainly involved in a supportive role and may have little involvement in work completed at home. Overall, these factors help to explain why triangulated accounts of homework remain relatively rare in the literature.

Evidently, when reviewing policies from different countries, a wide range of underlying ideologies becomes apparent. These vary from including differing beliefs about the purpose of homework, the role it should play in learning, and in some cases, whether homework should be set at all. Some of these policies are completely opposing and contrasting, yet none of them seem to have a complete or universally successful model for homework assignments. It seems that there will always be at least one stakeholder out of students, staff or parents will be unhappy or have concerns with the policy which a school adopts.

This is presuming that the teachers understand the policies and/or follow them, as evidence suggests that the majority of teachers and school leaders do not understand or do not fully follow these policies, which leads to further inconsistencies and further issues. It could be argued that teachers should have the autonomy to decide how and when to set homework, but this would likely lead to further inconsistencies and possibly lead to teachers setting too much homework and intervention needed to get teachers to reduce their homework (Xu and Yuan, 2003). Alternatively, teachers following a whole school policy dictated by school, local or national level might lead teachers to setting homework purely to conform and meet the policy, resulting in inappropriate homework to be assigned. Teachers need to be included in the development of homework policies because they are responsible for creating and setting the homework, marking and providing feedback where applicable (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2001).

When looking from a student's point of view, the majority appeared to favour a no-homework policy or at least a significant reduction in homework. However, whether this was in a student's best interest remained debatable. Regardless, students needed to be included in the process when deciding if and how homework should be set. If it was decided that homework should be assigned to students, despite them disliking it or considering it not worthwhile, student views on how and when to give homework were considered crucially important in developing a policy.

3.7 REFLECTIONS FOLLOWING THE LITERATURE REVIEW

After reviewing the available and relevant literature in this field regarding purpose, time, physical wellbeing, psychological wellbeing and policy, research was necessary and presented an opportunity for myself to conduct a genuine ethnography in a current school in England. As a teacher in a school for ten years, I was able to bring new insights to the field of wellbeing and homework and offer fresh and unique insights with my position.

A common caveat to the literature was the over-reliance on quantitative measures and maths as a subject to measure the effects of wellbeing. This was sometimes due to researchers not being embedded in the environment they were investigating and acting as outsiders who did not have the time or availability to conduct more extensive and time-consuming research such as an ethnography. As a member of staff who worked full time in a school, my access to participants and ability to have extended and detailed interviews as part of an ethnography allowed me to address this gap. Additionally, this enabled me to gain staff and student perspectives from a variety of subjects other than maths and allowed me to capture students' insights into how different subjects and their differing homework affected their wellbeing. I had access to a range of students aged between 11 and 19 for my research. I also had the availability of staff and students engaged in subjects ranging from traditional core subjects such as English and Maths, to more contemporary subjects such as Psychology and Computer Science, to vocational subjects such as Childcare and Art. Having access to and purposefully including a variety of subjects within my research was intended to provide a holistic and insightful view of the types of

homework and their effects on staff and students alike. It allowed me to explore a variety of homework, as well as uncover common pitfalls that led to negative effects of homework. Ideally, I hoped to uncover and explore positive effects of homework on staff and student wellbeing that could be applied to all subjects and consequently inform policy moving forward. These factors combined afforded me the opportunity to contribute to the literature in this area and further promote positive experiences in education for staff and students alike.

Based on the pilot study's initial findings and the above literature review, the research aim was to investigate whether there were any types of homework that had a positive or negative impact on student or staff wellbeing. The aim was to identify these types of homework so that they could be highlighted as key types of assignments to use in future teaching practice, ensuring that both teachers' and students' wellbeing was no longer negatively impacted by homework practice.

In light of the literature that has been outlined in this chapter, this thesis seeks to explore how homework impacts the wellbeing of both students and teachers within a secondary school setting. Although homework is a long-established feature of schooling, there remains limited qualitative insight into how impacts wellbeing of students and teachers. To address this gap, the study is guided by two central research questions:

1. What types of homework do students perceive as having a positive or negative impact on their wellbeing?
2. What types of homework do teachers perceive as having a positive or negative impact on student wellbeing?

These questions provide a clear focus for the ethnographic approach adopted in this thesis and form the basis for the analysis and discussion presented in the chapters that follow.

The literature review highlighted how research on homework had been shaped by the relationship between setting homework academic benefit, often without considering the wider consequences for students' and teachers' wellbeing. Although some studies acknowledged stress, time pressures, or emotional strain, these issues were rarely explored in detail or linked to specific types of homework tasks. This gap reinforced the need for a study that examined homework from a wellbeing perspective and the views of students and teachers. Now the literature review has been completed, this allows the thesis to look specifically at theoretical perspectives and frameworks surrounding homework.

4 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND FRAMEWORKS

This chapter presents the theoretical perspectives that guide the thesis and explains why they are relevant to understanding homework and wellbeing. It introduces the key theorists and models that help make sense of how and why homework is set and the potential impact this has on students attainment and progress. These frameworks are included because they offer practical ways of thinking about the different types of homework identified in the literature and how these tasks might influence wellbeing. By setting out these perspectives and frameworks, the chapter prepares provides an understanding as to why homework is used in education.

Homework is a commonly used tool throughout educational institutions around the world. The main rationale for this widespread homework use is to improve attainment and progress of students, whether that be by practice, rehearsal, assessing or some other purpose. Regardless, homework has been a routine feature of schooling for decades, with historical analyses showing its consistent use for well over a century (Gill and Schlossman, 2004). Within the British educational system, it has also generally been treated as an expected component of pupils' learning, with one white paper stating that "Homework is not an optional extra, but an essential part of a good education." (Department for Education and Employment, 1997, p. 57). The latest Framework Document for teachers also promotes students independence and taking responsibility for their learning, which could also include homework (Department for Education, 2014). Within this section on theoretical frameworks, the rationale and theory behind homework will be explored to gain an

understanding of the underlying reasons as to why homework is such a widely implemented pedagogical tool.

There are varying perspectives as to why we should set homework and the impact it has on students. One perspective particularly looks at the social aspects of homework and does not look at the individual student in isolation. Bempechat (2004) takes a Social-Cognitive approach to explaining homework behaviour and the value behind homework. She argues that skills gained from completing homework and the decision to complete homework does not happen in a vacuum without the effects of other influences, particularly social. For example, if a student does not revise or complete homework that builds up skills and knowledge that would better prepare them for a maths test, they are more likely to fail this test. The student might be motivated to do better on the next test, not due to their poor score or performance, but due to embarrassment from gaining a lower score than their peers. It is plausible to gain the same effect with positive scores on the test also. The same student might revise and complete homework tasks that result in a better score, and this would potentially result in praise and admiration by the student's peers. Regardless of the score on the test, the motivating aspect to completing their next homework task is the social interaction and appraisal by their peers. This perspective can be ever more important when students are given tasks that they do not naturally or intrinsically find engaging or interesting.

While Bempechat's (2004) Social-Cognitive perspective offers a useful starting point for understanding the social influences that influence and impact homework behaviour, it provides only a partial explanation for the experiences explored in this thesis. The focus on

peer appraisal and social motivation helps to explain why some students persist with tasks they do not enjoy, but it does not fully account for the emotional or contextual factors that emerged strongly in the literature on wellbeing. For example, Bempechat pays limited attention to the role of teacher expectations, family dynamics, or the internal beliefs students hold about themselves as learners. These gaps highlight the need to draw on additional theoretical perspectives that will be explored further on in this chapter, such as Expectancy-value theory (Trautwein *et al.*, 2006a), sociocultural approaches, and psychological frameworks put forward by Glasser (1999), Bowlby (1969) and Dweck (2008). These perspectives combined can build a more complete understanding of why certain types of homework are experienced positively or negatively. This broader theoretical base is essential for addressing the research questions, which focus on how students and teachers perceive the impact of homework on wellbeing rather than on attainment alone.

Furthermore, other social factors can also influence whether a student completes their homework or not. Some of these views are now outdated and stereotypical, however. For example, the “Deficit Model” (Glazer and Moynihan, 1970) states that students from families with low income, poor language skills where their native tongue is not English, and have low levels of education themselves are less likely to complete their homework and less likely to achieve in school. However, this has been challenged as teachers are willing to help engage students from the above social deficits and recognise that parents are more than willing to contribute to their children’s education (Epstein and Van Voorhis, 2001). This criticism highlights that the Deficit Model oversimplifies family backgrounds and wrongly assumes a lack of parental interest, rather than acknowledging the supportive practices that many teachers and parents already demonstrate. For example, homework tasks such as art can

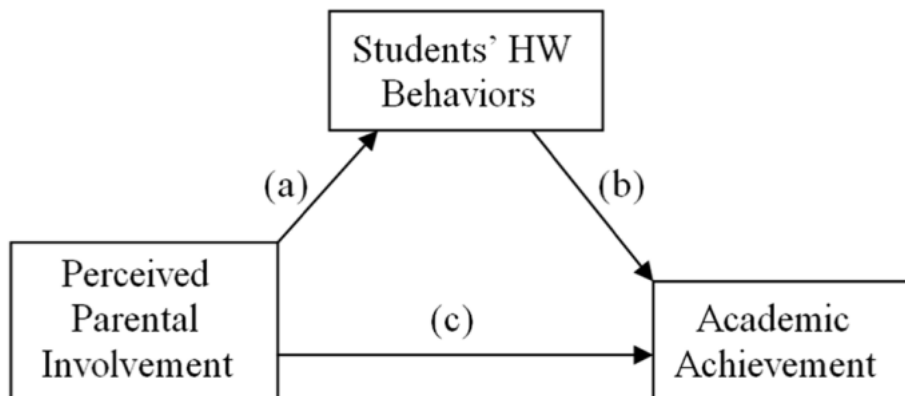
enable parents with low English language mastery to participate meaningfully in their child's work and support their progress.

Although these social perspectives highlight the important role of peer influence and family context in shaping homework behaviour, they offer only a partial explanation for the wellbeing-related experiences explored in this thesis. The Deficit Model (Glazer and Moynihan, 1970), in particular, has limited contemporary relevance because it overemphasises students through assumptions about family background rather than recognising the agency of teachers, parents and students themselves. More recent work, such as Epstein and Van Voorhis (2001), demonstrates that supportive relationships between school and home can counteract many of the disadvantages assumed by earlier models, suggesting that social context is more dynamic and responsive than deficit-based theories imply. However, these perspectives still focus primarily on external influences and do not fully account for the internal beliefs, motivations or emotional responses that shape how students experience homework. This highlights the need to integrate these social explanations with cognitive-motivational and psychological theories discussed later in the chapter, in order to understand why certain types of homework are perceived as positive or negative for wellbeing by both students and teachers.

Simplistic theoretical models of homework completion have been created and developed by researchers who wish to explore why homework is completed and under what circumstances are homework tasks not completed. One model that shows an overview of the interaction between parents, homework and achievement comes from Núñez *et al.*

(2015b), which can be seen in Figure 3 (below). However, this model does not seem appropriate or applicable due to various factors.

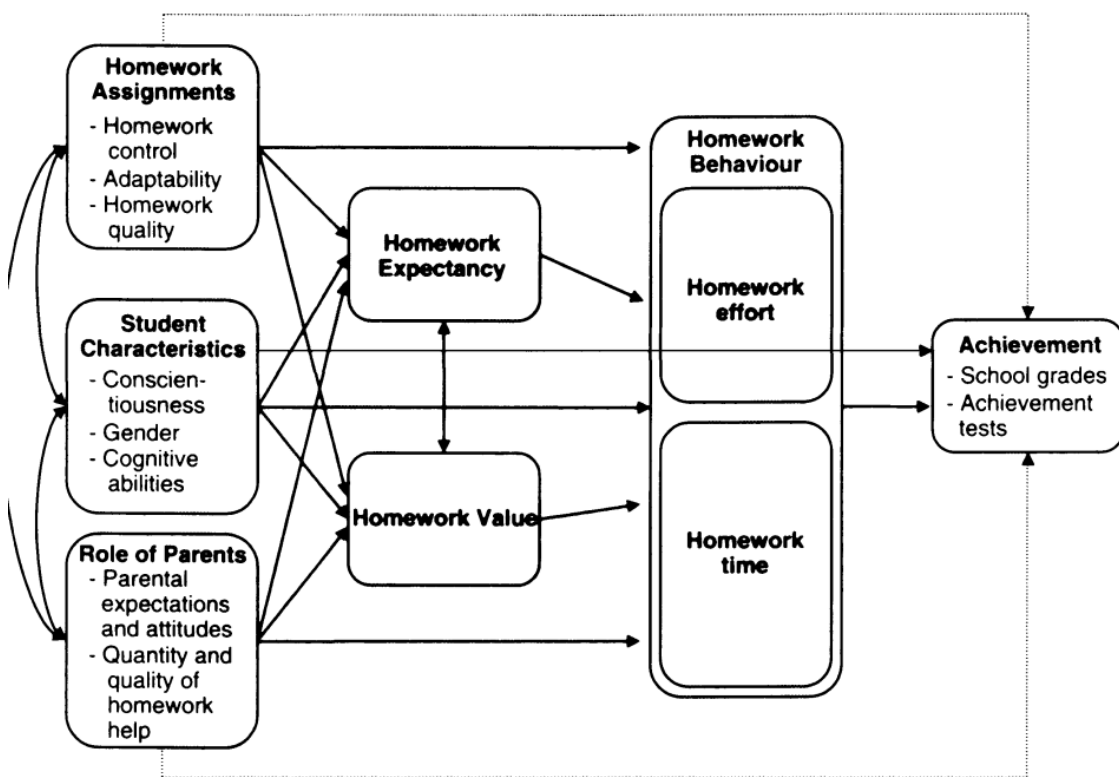
Figure 3: Hypothesised Mediation Model of the relationship between parent involvement in homework, students' homework behaviour and academic achievement (Núñez *et al.*, 2015b, p. 382)



Firstly, the focused outcome of the model is still on academic achievement, which appears to be a common theme whenever exploring homework as identified earlier in the literature review. Secondly, as the original study highlighted, as the age or stage of the student increases, the less parental involvement there is with homework. As this thesis study is focusing on secondary education and sixth form only, it would be a reasonable assumption to make that older students do not gain as much parental involvement with homework tasks due to their decreased knowledge or skill set at a later stage of schooling, as well as an increased independence from the students themselves. Thirdly, this model seems too restrictive to capture the complexities of the different types of homework tasks and the rationale behind them, unlike that of Trautwein *et al.* (2006a), for example. A more holistic model would be needed to capture these complexities.

One model that captures the complexities of homework behaviour comes from Expectancy-Value Theory (Trautwein *et al.*, 2006a). This model shows that setting homework regularly can indeed have multiple positive outcomes. The outline of the model can be seen below in Figure 4. (below), where it shows an improvement in homework completion behaviour and consequently grades.

Figure 4: Expectancy-Value Theory and homework (Trautwein *et al.*, 2006a, p. 1096)



The theory is fundamentally split into two key parts. Expectancy relates to how well students can complete their homework and is related to a student’s self-efficacy. It will involve a student’s perception of the difficulty of the task, whether they have the ability to complete it and if they have support or tools/materials available to help complete the homework if it is difficult. The Value element of the theory relates to the reason as to why

they should engage and complete the homework set. If the homework seems to have value, such as towards a grade or helping them achieve a desirable outcome (academic or non-academic), then again, students are more likely to complete it. A student is less likely to complete homework if one or both of these key elements are not being met. For example, if a student feels they are unable to complete the work or if it is too difficult, they are less likely to engage with the task. Alternatively, if a student feels that the task has no benefits or will not aid them in a way that they value, they will also not engage with the task. If neither of these elements are met, then it is highly unlikely that a student will engage with the homework piece. This will also have implications with the effort and time they invest into their homework. Students who do not complete their homework due to an issue relating to Expectancy or Value will likely have negative consequences such as detentions or negative labelling. If a student does complete the homework despite issues relating to Expectancy or Value, they are likely to build resentment towards the teacher, subject, school or completing homework in general. This is likely to have a direct influence on future homework rates as well as academic achievement. However, a reoccurring theme is still prevalent here, which shows that the final box in the model is focused on “Academic Achievement”, whereas the present study wants to have a final focus on wellbeing.

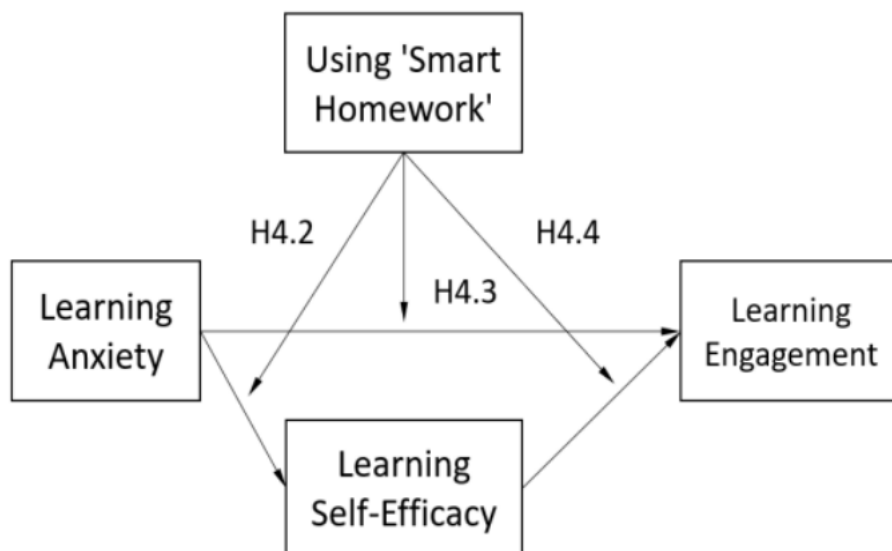
Taken together, these models highlight important aspects of homework behaviour but remain limited for the purposes of this thesis. The first model put forward by Núñez *et al.* (2015b) offers a useful overview of parental involvement but retains a narrow focus on academic achievement. Expectancy-Value Theory (Trautwein *et al.*, 2006a) instead provides a more detailed account of students’ motivation and decision making. Furthermore, the model also positions achievement as the final outcome and pays less attention to the

emotional and relational dimensions of homework. Both models therefore explain why homework may or may not be completed, but neither fully captures how different types of homework are experienced by students and teachers in ways that support or undermine wellbeing. These limitations reinforce the need to draw on broader psychological and sociocultural theories, which offer more comprehensive ways of understanding the impact of homework on wellbeing.

The Expectancy-Value Theory proposed by Trautwein *et al.* (2006a) shows how important it is to understand what students value, and what students feel that they can complete when homework is set. The main study's ethnographic approach allowed this to be explored in an open and honest way within a real-life context. It is important for students' wellbeing that work is set that that they value and can complete. In doing so, there is potential to improve their immediate wellbeing by them engaging and enjoying their work in school, as well as their long-term wellbeing by improving their grades as predicted by the model. There is also a risk to students' mental wellbeing when they are set tasks they feel unable to complete, as this may contribute to feelings of inadequacy and a weakened sense of self-belief. Student voice and input into the homework they receive is an important indicator of whether teachers are setting work that students can realistically complete, particularly given that students are often positioned as the overlooked voice in homework practices (Warton, 2001). Additionally, when looking at the Value element of homework, there are items that students will value outside of their academic studies. This might include issues such as rising obesity, knife and gang culture, or financial worries. If students value and want to know more about these wider world issues, it can help them gain non-academic benefits such as getting a better understanding of the world around (White, 2011).

Another model of homework and anxiety has been produced by Zhang, Xiao and Fu (2023) due to high anxiety in China, and the need to implement a “Double Reduction” policy as mentioned earlier. This model can be seen overleaf in Figure 5 (below). This examined Learning Anxiety as the independent variable, Learning Engagement as the dependent variable, and the final two aspects of SMART homework and Learning Self-Efficacy as mediating and regulating variables. Despite SMART homework being designed to reduce student workload and lower anxiety levels, it is notable that the learning anxiety is not the primary focus in the research by Zhang, Xiao and Fu (2023) . It appears the focus is to examine how anxiety levels affect engagement in homework, whereas this thesis suggests it is the reverse that should be investigated.

Figure 5: Theoretical Model for Smart Homework (Zhang, Xiao and Fu, 2023, p. 9)



Previously, positive and student-centred theoretical explanations have been illustrated as to the reason for homework being set. However, there are some theoretical explanations of

homework that are less student-centred or linked towards academic achievement. One such theory is that of the “Hidden Curriculum” (Bowles, 1976). This theory suggests that schools do not just impart knowledge of subjects or prepare them for exams but are actually socialising students in such a way as to conform them to the hierarchies within society and to obey those in positions of power. Although this is a Marxist perspective, ultimately students are being conditioned and socialised to carry out tasks that they do not wish to do or value but must complete this because someone in a position of power has told them to do so. This can be applied to the whole institution and working of a school, for example, a bell in school signals the end of lessons and the start of lunchtime, the same as a bell would indicate the end of a morning work shift and the start of a lunchtime within a factory. A parallel can also be drawn directly with homework, for example, if a manager in the workplace in a position of authority gives a subordinate a task that they do not wish to complete, they must still do this regardless of their own wishes. This Marxist view of education and homework is ultimately linked to students learning to submit and obey orders of those in power (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Although it could be argued this is still a necessary power dynamic that needs to be learnt in the workplace, it surely should not be the main driver as to why homework is set (Kohn, 2006a) . It would also be detrimental to the student’s wellbeing in terms of setting tasks that have no benefit to the student academically and is likely to lead to a loss of love of learning and growth within education.

Another perspective that opposes the implementation of homework is put forward by Kohn (2006b). Kohn explains how students had “Better Get Used To It” (BGUTI) (Kohn, 2006b, p. 141) , stating that students are given homework for the sake of it and that students mus

t get better at doing homework at a later point in school. Additionally, teachers give out homework as part of a routine and they do not think about why they are giving this out to students. Students might get set homework in primary school because they are likely to get homework in secondary school, and therefore need to practice it. However, Kohn argues that surely homework should be given to help improve students' knowledge, rather than to practice completing homework for the sake of it. When linking to earlier theories such as Expectancy-Value theory, this is not prioritising students' wellbeing, and students will certainly not see the value of homework if this is the primary reason as to why it is set. This thesis aims to explore this further and understand teachers views as to why they set homework and how this affects the wellbeing of teachers as well as students.

Although these models have been influential, much of the theoretical literature on homework is now dated and reflects more traditional, achievement-driven perspectives. Frameworks such as Expectancy-Value Theory (Trautwein *et al.*, 2006a), the Hidden Curriculum (Bowles, 1976), and early critiques such as Kohn (2006b) were developed in very different educational contexts and were before recent significant events such as Covid-19 and the resulting concerns regarding wellbeing. More recent research highlights how the education has shifted significantly, with wellbeing, anxiety, and student voice becoming central to discussions about learning (Department for Education, 2023). Positioning these earlier theories as traditional perspectives helps to highlight the absence of more non-traditional, wellbeing-centred approaches in the literature. This gap reinforces the need for this thesis to re-examine homework through a contemporary lens that prioritises wellbeing alongside academic outcomes, particularly given the growing and contemporary

evidence that homework can negatively impact both student and teacher wellbeing (Gao *et al.*, 2025).

An alternative approach to those discussed above is offered by Dewey (2012), whose educational philosophy promotes a more liberal and organic form of home learning . The theories reviewed so far assume homework involves teachers directing students to complete a fixed set of tasks by a particular deadline. In contrast, Dewey argues for a more flexible and open-ended style of education, which naturally extends to a different, more learner-driven understanding of home learning.

Dewey's educational philosophy offers a valuable alternative to more traditional, task-driven conceptions of homework. Rather than viewing learning as the completion of prescribed activities, Dewey positions education as a process of growth, shaped by the learner's interactions with their environment (Dewey, 2012). Two concepts central to this view are dependence and plasticity, which together describe the developmental conditions that enable children to learn. For Dewey, dependence is not a weakness but a natural feature of childhood. Young people rely on adults, peers and social contexts to provide the experiences through which they develop socially, emotionally and intellectually (Dewey, 2012). Plasticity refers to the capacity to be shaped by these experiences. For example, the openness, adaptability and responsiveness that allow children to learn from a wide range of situations. These concepts frame learning as an organic, experiential process in which growth emerges from meaningful engagement with the world rather than from compliance with externally imposed tasks.

From this perspective, homework is most valuable when it supports curiosity, autonomy and purposeful exploration, and least effective when it becomes routine, rigid or disconnected from students' lived experiences (Biesta, 2010). Dewey's framework provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the importance of flexibility, agency and relevance in homework design. Dewey's emphasis on growth, experience and the social nature of learning aligns closely with contemporary concerns about student wellbeing, suggesting that educational practices should nurture rather than constrain the developmental capacities of young people (Noddings, 2013).

However, homework policies are too restrictive and when enforced, hinder the natural love of learning that children have (Darling, 1994). Again, as outlined earlier these homework policies are often put in place so that schools can reach educational targets. This can also be seen by prioritising subjects over others, and therefore putting even more importance on homework being completed for these prioritised subjects, such as the English Baccalaureate (Ebacc.) subjects, for example (Peters, 2015). Perhaps giving students at least some elements of choice and freedom to choose their topics or how to complete their homework will enhance student experience within schools and allow them to take part in important enrichment activities. Dewey would even argue that homework should not be set as students will naturally gravitate towards tasks of interest outside of school due to the innate desire to learn, and Dewey would argue that this promotes independence and a more self-exploratory learning style. This would be best for the student's wellbeing and this is critically important for the student's educational journey (Brighouse, 2006).

Glasser's (1999) Choice Theory proposes that all human behaviour is driven by the desire to meet five basic psychological needs: survival, love and belonging, power, freedom and fun. When these needs are met, individuals experience greater wellbeing, motivation and engagement. However, when they are constrained, behaviour often becomes resistant, anxious or avoidant. In educational contexts, Glasser argues that students learn most effectively when they feel a sense of ownership over their actions and when tasks align with their internal motivations rather than external pressures (Glasser, 1990). For example, accountability systems can create cultures of surveillance in which teachers fear sanctions, capability procedures or managerial scrutiny for not meeting policy expectations (Perryman, 2006). These pressures illustrate how institutional demands can restrict teacher autonomy and shape homework practices in ways that prioritise compliance over professional judgement (Wilkins, 2011).

Teachers fearing disciplinaries for not confirming to policy or not getting good outcomes for their students is a common feeling within some parts of the teaching profession (Perryman, 2006). Ball's (2003) analysis of performativity provides an important sociological lens for understanding the wider policy environment in which homework practices are shaped. Performativity refers to the ways in which schools, teachers and students are required to demonstrate measurable performance in response to accountability systems, inspection frameworks and competitive pressures (Ball, 2003). In such contexts, educational practices can become driven less by pedagogical purpose and more by the need to produce visible indicators of compliance, rigour or productivity. Homework is often implicated in these dynamics. These experiences align with Ball's argument that performative cultures can distort educational priorities, intensify workload and undermine wellbeing. For students,

performativity can manifest as increased pressure, fear of failure and a sense that homework is something to be “done” rather than a meaningful part of learning. Ball’s framework therefore shows how policy within the school environment can shape homework practice for both teachers and students, and without autonomy from the teachers or students.

Wellbeing is fundamentally shaped by psychological processes, and any research of how students experience homework must therefore be grounded in mental health theory. Contemporary frameworks emphasise that wellbeing arises from the interaction between emotional regulation, perceived support, self-belief and the capacity to manage everyday demands (Dodge *et al.*, 2012). These processes are not fixed traits but are influenced by students’ internal expectations of themselves and others, their sense of competence, and the relational environments in which learning takes place (Ryan and Deci, 2017). Integrating psychological perspectives into the literature review is therefore essential for understanding the emotional responses evident in this study, particularly the stress, worry and pressure described by students when homework felt overwhelming or unpredictable. This framing also clarifies why theories such as Dweck’s mindset, Bowlby’s Internal Working Model and Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development are relevant. Each of these theories offer a different perspective on how students interpret challenge, seek support and regulate their emotions, all of which are central to wellbeing.

Bowlby’s (1969) concept of the Internal Working Model (IWM) is particularly important for understanding the relationship between homework and wellbeing. The IWM refers to the internalised expectations individuals hold about themselves and others, shaped by early

experiences and carried forward into later interactions (Bowlby, 1969). These models influence how students interpret challenge, perceive support and regulate their emotions in learning contexts. Secure IWMs are associated with greater emotional stability, confidence and resilience, whereas insecure IWMs can heighten anxiety, self-doubt and sensitivity to perceived failure (Bergin and Bergin, 2009). Bergin and Bergin (2009) emphasise that attachment security shapes students' willingness to take on challenge, their capacity to regulate emotion, and their expectations of whether adults will respond supportively. As their review draws primarily on large-scale developmental and school-based studies, it highlights broad patterns but offers limited insight into how these processes are lived and interpreted in everyday classroom practice. By contrast, the ethnographic approach in this thesis captures the subjective meanings students attach to homework demands, allowing the mechanisms identified by Bergin and Bergin (2009) to be understood through students' own experiences and perceptions. In the context of homework, students' IWMs could shape how they experience academic demands. For example, predictable routines, clear explanations and supportive teacher relationships can function as a "secure base" and consequently promote wellbeing. However, inconsistent or overwhelming homework practices may activate feelings of threat or uncertainty. Making this link explicit highlights that wellbeing is not only influenced by the nature of homework tasks but also by the deeper psychological frameworks through which students interpret them (O'Connor and McCartney, 2007).

Dweck's theory of growth mindset provides a useful complement to Dewey's emphasis on development and experience. Growth mindset theory proposes that learners' beliefs about intelligence, whether they view it as fixed or malleable, shape their motivation, resilience

and responses to challenge (Dweck, 2008). Students who believe their abilities can develop through effort and effective strategies are more likely to persist with difficult tasks, seek feedback and experience setbacks as part of the learning process. In contrast, a fixed mindset can lead students to avoid challenge, fear failure and interpret difficulty as evidence of low ability. When homework supports mastery, autonomy and a sense of achievable challenge, it can reinforce a growth mindset and contribute to wellbeing. However, when homework is excessive, poorly timed or perceived as lacking purpose, it could undermine motivation and reinforce fixed-mindset beliefs about ability and worth (Yeager and Dweck, 2012). Dweck's framework therefore offers a valuable lens for understanding the emotional and motivational elements of homework, highlighting the importance of designing tasks that promote confidence, independence and meaningful progress.

However, Dweck's framework has been widely critiqued, and these limitations need to be acknowledged to avoid adopting the theory uncritically. Meta-analyses have shown that growth-mindset interventions often produce very small or inconsistent effects on academic outcomes, raising questions about the robustness of the theory in real-world educational settings (Sisk *et al.*, 2018). This is particularly relevant for homework. A student may be encouraged to persist, but this does little to mitigate tasks that are excessive, poorly timed or do not meet the students' needs. Even Dweck herself has acknowledged that mindset interventions are highly dependent on context and can be implemented superficially, limiting their impact (Yeager and Dweck, 2020). These critiques indicate that while growth mindset theory offers useful insights into motivation and resilience, it must be integrated with broader sociocultural and psychological perspectives to understand how homework practices support or undermine wellbeing.

Bowlby's attachment theory also offers an important psychological lens for understanding how students experience homework and how these experiences relate to wellbeing. Attachment theory proposes that children develop internal working models of themselves and others based on the quality of early relationships, particularly the extent to which caregivers provide security, consistency and emotional awareness (Bowlby, 1969; Bowlby, 1990). A secure attachment fosters confidence, resilience and the capacity to tolerate challenge, whereas insecure attachment can heighten anxiety, avoidance or fear of failure (Ainsworth, 1978). Although originally developed to explain early childhood development, attachment principles, such as the Internal Working Model, remain relevant throughout schooling, shaping how students interpret expectations, respond to feedback and manage academic demands (Bergin and Bergin, 2009). In the context of homework, predictable routines, clear explanations and supportive teacher–student relationships can function as a form of “secure base”, reducing stress and enabling students to engage with tasks more confidently. Conversely, homework that is unpredictable, punitive or poorly explained may evoke feelings of threat or uncertainty, particularly for students who already struggle with emotional regulation. It also highlights that wellbeing is shaped not only by the tasks themselves but by the trust, clarity and emotional safety students perceive in their interactions with teachers.

Although teachers are not attachment figures in the traditional sense, several studies suggest that they can nonetheless provide “secure-base-like” functions within school environments. Hamre and Pianta (2001) found that warm, predictable and emotionally supportive teacher-student relationships promote confidence, reduce anxiety and encourage students to engage with challenging tasks. The longitudinal analysis by Hamre

and Pianta (2001) shows that early teacher-child relationships characterised by low conflict and high emotional support predict academic and behavioural outcomes through to eighth grade. Their large scale quantitative design identifies broad developmental patterns but offers limited insight into how students themselves experience these relationships in daily classroom life. The ethnographic approach in this thesis therefore adds depth by capturing how students interpret teacher warmth, predictability and support as stabilising influences within homework contexts.

Similarly, O'Connor and McCartney (2007) reported that positive teacher-child relationships are associated with greater emotional security and improved academic adjustment, indicating that teachers can offer a form of stability that supports learning. Their research further demonstrated that high-quality teacher-child relationships can buffer children from the negative effects of insecure maternal attachment, suggesting that teachers may function as alternative sources of emotional security. However, their ecological-model analysis focuses on statistical associations rather than the lived meanings students attach to these relationships. This thesis' ethnography complements this by examining how students perceive teacher availability and consistency as forms of everyday stability that shape their engagement with homework. From this perspective, consistent routines, clear expectations and interactions may operate as a functional secure base in the classroom, even if they do not constitute a full attachment bond. ()

However, it is important to recognise the limits of applying attachment theory directly to teacher-pupil relationships. While predictable routines interactions can offer a sense of stability, researchers caution against equating teachers with attachment figures; Sabol and

Pianta (2012) argue that teachers typically do not spend enough sustained, one-to-one time with individual pupils to form the deep, enduring bonds characteristic of true attachment relationships. From this perspective, teacher-pupil interactions may provide elements of security and consistency, but they do not constitute a full “secure base” in the attachment sense. This distinction is important when considering homework. Supportive relationships may reduce stress and promote engagement, yet they should not be conceptualised as equivalent to the attachment bonds described by Bowlby. ()

Furthermore, attachment theory also has limitations that need to be acknowledged. Researchers such as Rutter (1991) have argued that Bowlby’s early work placed too much emphasis on the mother–child relationship and underplayed the role of wider social, cultural and environmental factors in shaping children’s emotional development. Later research has also shown that attachment patterns are more fluid and context-dependent than Bowlby originally proposed, meaning that school based relationships do not simply mirror early attachment experiences (Cassidy and Shaver, 2008). These critiques suggest that while attachment theory adds value for understanding students’ emotional responses to homework, it must be used alongside broader sociocultural and contextual perspectives to avoid over simplifying the complex factors that shape wellbeing. ()

Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory provides a further lens for understanding how students experience homework, particularly through the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The ZPD describes the space between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with appropriate guidance or support (Vygotskiï, 1978). Learning is most effective when tasks fall within this zone, offering challenge without

overwhelming the learner's current capabilities. Vygotsky's theory is the foundation of a widely used pedagogical practice of scaffolding. Scaffolding is the temporary support provided by teachers, peers or tools that enables students to progress through this zone and gradually internalise new skills (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976). In the context of homework, tasks that are clearly explained, appropriately pitched and connected to prior classroom learning can function as effective scaffolds, promoting confidence, mastery and wellbeing. However, when homework is too difficult, insufficiently supported or disconnected from what students have been taught, it can fall outside the ZPD and can generate frustration, anxiety and disengagement. Vygotsky's framework therefore reinforces the importance of designing homework that is responsive to students' developmental needs and that provides the right balance of challenge and support.

However, Vygotsky's (1978) framework also has limitations that need to be acknowledged. Some scholars argue that the ZPD is conceptually broad and can be difficult to operationalise reliably in classroom settings, making it challenging for teachers to judge the precise level of support a learner requires (Kozulin, 2003). Others note that Vygotsky's original writings provide limited guidance on how scaffolding should be structured or withdrawn in practice, meaning that contemporary applications often rely on later interpretations rather than Vygotsky's own work (Stone, 1998). In addition, sociocultural theorists have highlighted that the ZPD can be constrained by wider educational factors such as class size, curriculum pacing and assessment pressures, which limit teachers' capacity to provide the responsive support the theory assumes (Daniels, 2008). These critiques suggest that while Vygotsky's theory gives insight into understanding why some homework tasks feel achievable and others overwhelming, they must be applied cautiously for students in secondary schooling.

When looking at key psychological theories and perspectives, all can offer some insight into how homework can be received by students. Behaviourist perspectives emphasise reinforcement, routine and external control, framing homework as a means of strengthening desired behaviours through repetition, rewards or sanctions (Skinner, 1953). This helps explain why some schools adopt fixed homework timetables or punitive systems .

Furthermore, conditioning can be directly applied to homework and the consequences of completing it or not. Rewards such as good scores or grades, as well as recognition for completing homework can be seen as positive reinforcers. Additionally, sanctions for not completing homework or receiving negative feedback can act as a form of punishment that means students might actively avoid homework. Constructivist theories, by contrast, position learners as active participants who build understanding through engagement with authentic tasks and prior knowledge (Piaget, 1971; Bruner, 1966). From this viewpoint, homework is most effective when it is purposeful, relevant and connected to classroom learning. Humanist approaches place wellbeing, autonomy and personal growth at the centre of education, emphasising the importance of choice, intrinsic motivation and respect for learners' lived experiences (Rogers, 1969; Maslow, 1970). This is a shared ambition likely shared by teachers as well, who set homework to enable students to reach their goals and achieve high grades. Cognitivist theories focus on memory, processing and cognitive load, highlighting how excessive or poorly timed homework can overwhelm students' capacity to learn effectively (Sweller, 1988). Together, these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that homework is not a neutral practice but one that interacts with motivation, cognition and emotion in complex ways, shaping both learning outcomes and wellbeing.

Reviewing the various theoretical frameworks makes it clear that there is a lack of focus on the links between wellbeing and homework. When these are linked, this seems to be a secondary focus with attainment being the primary driver. These are not sufficient, especially when research cited earlier displayed the growing negative impact of homework on wellbeing for both students and teachers. From a survey of the literature, there are no review of theories of homework regarding wellbeing.

The chapter set out the theoretical perspectives that supported the thesis and helped explain why certain types of homework might influence wellbeing differently for students and teachers. These ideas provided a straightforward way of understanding pressure, motivation, and emotional responses within school settings. With this theoretical base established, the thesis will move on to the research methods and methodology, the current thesis research will be outlined in full.

5 RESEARCH METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the methodological standpoint of the thesis and the rationale to the methods used in the thesis. It describes the ethnographic design, the use of interviews, focus groups, and photographs, and the reasons these methods were appropriate for exploring the experiences of students and teachers, especially when focusing on wellbeing. The chapter also outlines the practical steps taken during data collection, including how participants were recruited and how ethical considerations were addressed throughout the process. How the ethnography was designed and conducted is set out in smaller bespoke sub-chapters below.

5.1 THE CASE FOR AN ETHNOGRAPHY

Firstly, it is worth noting that the concept of wellbeing is highly subjective and an individual's experience and understanding of it is a complex area to research. Although this is the standpoint of the main research, it is important to recognise an alternative perspective where wellbeing is indeed measurable. Some researchers have argued that it can successfully be measured objectively and empirically, such as (Coe *et al.*, 2017; Diener, Oishi and Lucas, 2015; Huppert and So, 2013) . Some theorists working from a realist ontological and epistemological position argued that research findings can be generalised and applied across contexts (Cunliffe, 2011). From this perspective, ethnographic work is often criticised for being value-laden and vulnerable to researcher bias, which is seen as a threat to validity

(May, 2011). Interpretivists, however, reject this positivist critique (Bryman, 2012). They argued that student and staff wellbeing was inherently personal and subjective and therefore required methods that acknowledged and explored this complexity. Positivist's objective approaches were too detached and abstract for this purpose, whereas ethnography offers the depth and contextual insight needed to understand lived experiences (Krang and Cook, 2007).

This thesis was guided by two central research questions which shaped the methodological decisions outlined in this chapter. These questions reflected the exploratory and interpretive nature of the ethnographic approach and provided a clear focus for the analysis that followed. The research questions were:

1. What types of homework do students perceive as having a positive or negative impact on their wellbeing?
2. What types of homework do teachers perceive as having a positive or negative impact on student wellbeing?

These questions aligned closely with the ethnographic design of this thesis, as they required attention to participants' lived experiences within the school setting. They informed the selection of participants, the design of the ethnographic approach in terms of interviews and the use of images, and the use of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) after the ethnography was completed.

The methodological perspective of this thesis is grounded in the broader philosophy of the social sciences, drawing on the interpretivist tradition. Although ethnography originated in anthropology and the study of "the field" in distant or unfamiliar cultural settings, its

principles have long since been applied to classrooms and other everyday social environments, where the aim is to understand how meaning is constructed within naturally occurring contexts (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). This shift reflected a wider movement in the social sciences away from positivist assumptions of objective, measurable reality and towards an appreciation of the subjective and interpretive nature of human experience. Epistemologically, the thesis aligned with constructivism, which held that knowledge is constructed through interpretation and lived experiences rather than discovered as an objective truth (Crotty, 1998). This position resonates with Polanyi (1958), who argued that all knowledge is inherently personal and shaped by understanding, and stands in contrast to Popper (1979), who viewed objective knowledge as something that can be tested, falsified and generalised. While Popper's contribution remains foundational to scientific inquiry, it is less suited to research questions concerned with lived experience such as this thesis within a school.

The interpretivist paradigm adopted here is also consistent with the argument put forward by Kuhn (1996), who argued that scientific inquiry is shaped by paradigms - shared sets of assumptions that guide what counts as legitimate knowledge. In education, the dominance of positivist paradigms has been increasingly challenged by interpretivist approaches that seek to understand experience and the individuals perspective. Ryan (1970) and his philosophy of the social sciences further supported this position, emphasising that social phenomena cannot be studied in the same way as natural phenomena because they are defined by the meanings individuals give them. This philosophical standpoint provided a rationale for the qualitative design used in this study. Qualitative inquiry enabled the exploration of the emotional and contextual dimensions of homework and wellbeing in ways

that quantitative approaches cannot easily capture (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Although mixed-methods designs can offer breadth and triangulation, they were not pursued here because they typically rest on a pragmatic paradigm that combined differing ontological and epistemological assumptions (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). Introducing quantitative measures would have required a shift towards post-positivist assumptions about measurement and generalisability, which would have been unsuitable within this thesis research (Bryman, 2012). Moreover, quantitative instruments risked reducing complex experiences to predefined categories, potentially obscuring the very nuances this research sought to illuminate (Maxwell, 2012). For these reasons, a qualitative, interpretivist approach, informed by ethnographic methods and grounded in the philosophy of the social sciences, provided the most appropriate methodological foundation for addressing the research questions.

As outlined in the literature review section, there is an abundance of research that has focused on homework, on quantitative data and on gaining statistical outcomes. The methodologies of these studies were arguably well suited when considering that the primary research aim was to assess the effectiveness of homework on students' outcomes such as attainment and/or examination results. Some of these studies included different homework strategies, conditions, or assignments with the aim to directly pinpoint cause and effect of a variety of strategies on outcomes. However, when viewing student and staff wellbeing and their lived experience, a similar design would not only be unsuitable, but arguably unethical also. For example, taking a similar approach to research above and using an independent measures design where I allocate what is deemed to be "Low Stress" homework to one group, and "High Stress" homework to another, would be unethical in the short term within

the study, as well as potentially being unethical in the long term due to the consequences of the student's viewpoint of education. Additionally, a repeated measures design in a similar study would also expose students to a "High Stress" homework condition, subjected to the same risks. An experimental or comparative study focused on collecting quantitative data would arguably be sufficient when looking at outcomes, and would be methodologically easier to compare conditions (Gorard, 2013), but it was not suitable for this thesis. The risk of negative consequences to the student individually, and arguably for the school environment, were not justifiable. However, an ethnographical approach allowed the investigation of staff and student wellbeing affected by homework without any direct or indirect interference or imposing conditions to either party.

An alternative methodology that would not have had direct manipulation of homework tasks and/or groupings would have been that of surveys or questionnaires. One survey that was identified when looking through the literature was the "Subject Student Wellbeing Survey" (Renshaw, Long and Cook, 2015) which was designed specifically for student wellbeing. Furthermore, the "Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale" (Tennant *et al.*, 2007) was also identified as a being a reputable survey for staff wellbeing and gained high internal validity (Renshaw, 2018) and reliability (Stewart-Brown, 2009) scores when scrutinised. Other well established institutions used similar and well regarded questionnaires and toolkits, such as the Classroom Wellbeing Toolkit (Anna Freud Centre, 2024). The questionnaires would have been useful to give to students and staff and would especially be appreciated by staff considering the growing workload and pressures in school leading to

teachers gaining limited time. However, these questionnaires with Likert style questions did not allow for elaboration on answers or allow for depth or freedom of answer from the participant. This could have become quite limiting and miss opportunities for further discussion and exploration. Indeed, giving participants questionnaires and surveys was even highlighted as a mistake by the participants themselves in Venkatesh (2009), where his research sample highlighted that these will gain no insight into the group he was infiltrating. The participants themselves encouraged ethnographical research due to the increased understanding and insight that only an ethnography could give.

An ethnography compensated for these weaknesses and allowed the researcher to gain a more holistic understanding of the effects of homework on wellbeing. Furthermore, the use of questionnaires felt very much like an 'Outsiders' way of investigating with a school. Due to safeguarding concerns and limited access to students, a questionnaire seems a suitable (but ultimately limited) methodology that distant research would have to employ due to the limited or difficult access to school children or staff. An ethnography is a rarely encountered research methodology found in schools due to how difficult it is to gain access to students' work and the students themselves due to gatekeepers. Feldman, Bell and Berger (2003) described this as a "rude surprise" (Feldman, Bell and Berger, 2003, p. 3) for those trying to gain access to key groups when conducting an ethnography. If this barrier can be overcome, the results and data gained will be much richer in detail and have an additional practical benefit in the future.

A clear alternative is an idealist ontology and interpretivist epistemology as it is the most suitable for investigating the personal experience of staff and students regarding how they

interpret the school homework system and its effects. Students and staff had direct experience and understanding of the school environment that they were part of and therefore these were the right epistemological and ontological perspectives to take (Cunliffe, 2011). Additionally, students across different year groups held varied perspectives and made sense of the school homework policy and practice in different ways. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2011) emphasised that interpretivist research began from the assumption that individuals constructed meaning from their situated experiences; applying this to the thesis setting, students' interpretations varied according to their age, subjects studied, and the varying pressures they encountered. These interpretive differences were equally evident among staff also. Staff will specialise in different subjects which will have had varying demands, taught different year groups with varying abilities, and taught different classes where some have exam pressures and others do not. It is this variability that has led to the rejection of an autoethnography research methodology. Although it has been highlighted that autoethnographies are exceptionally useful and insightful for professions (McIlveen, 2008) and vocations (such as teaching, for example), it risked being limited and unrepresentative of the institution being researched. Furthermore, autoethnographies have also been cited for being insightful when researching emotions and interpersonal concepts such as wellbeing (Adams, 2015). However, this is still limiting to the single autoethnographer. Focusing exclusively on the researcher's own experience made it difficult to capture the range and complexity of experiences within a school, and would inevitably have reflected the researcher's particular position (their teaching specialism, year groups taught etc) and subject area which could have meant other perspectives were missed (Atkinson *et al.*, 2007). Although an ethnographic study was also shaped by the researcher's

subjectivity, it allowed for a wider set of voices and experiences to be included, which helped reduce limitation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

Taken together, these points explain why ethnography was the most appropriate methodology for answering the research questions in this thesis. The questions required an understanding of how homework practices were experienced by students and staff in their everyday school context, and how these experiences shaped their wellbeing. This was especially important given the focus of the two research questions, which asked how different types of homework were perceived by students and teachers as having a positive or negative impact on wellbeing. Answering these questions required access to the everyday meanings, pressures and routines surrounding homework, and to the ways students and teachers interpreted these experiences within the school context.

Ethnography enabled these perceptions to be explored in depth and in relation to the wider culture of the school, which would not have been possible through more structured or detached methods. Ethnography is well suited to this because it enables the researcher to explore meaning, routines and interactions as they naturally occur, rather than relying on predefined categories or manipulated conditions. The authors cited throughout this section support this decision: scholars such as Hammersley and Atkinson (2019), Pole and Morrison (2003) and Woods (1986) emphasise that ethnography is particularly valuable in educational settings where practices are embedded in culture, power relations and institutional norms. Their work underlines that ethnographies in particular are ideal for capturing these features in schools, which is why this approach was the most appropriate for addressing the aims of this thesis .

5.2 AN ETHNOGRAPHY ON HOMEWORK

The main research consisted of an ethnography involving teaching staff and students of all year groups throughout the school, including the attached sixth form. All teaching staff were interviewed individually. Students were interviewed either individually, in pairs or in small groups no larger than five at a time. As well as these interviews, students and staff brought artefacts such as example pieces of homework, assignments, and homework schedules that they had produced. These items were used as prompts and focal points within the interviews to support participants' accounts and as well as being examples that added value to their statements. This approach aligned with ethnographic guidance on the value of material artefacts in eliciting situated meanings and practices (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019), though the specific artefacts used in the thesis study were generated by participants within the thesis research setting. The purpose of students and staff bringing these artefacts to the interviews and focus groups was to promote discussion, encourage dialogue, and support elaboration of their experiences of homework. While the artefacts themselves were generated within the thesis research setting, their use as prompts reflected wider methodological guidance on the value of material objects to promote discussion, dialogue and elaboration of participants own experience (Robson, 2002). In this thesis, the artefacts were treated as part of the data and contributed to the overall ethnographic findings. Within the interviews, these items proved especially productive as they were thought-provoking, stimulated the discussion between the researcher and participant, and enabled data to be "produced, not given" (Robson, 2011, p. 427) in line with the principles of ethnographic knowledge generation. These discussions also led to further data being

generated through interaction, rather than merely collected, reflecting the suggestion put forward by Mason (2002), that qualitative data is actively produced within the research encounter.

Interviewing students in focus groups where possible was important not just for data generation as stated above. It was important as it allowed students to feel more comfortable and confident enough to speak and discuss what could potentially be a sensitive topic or a topic that is the source of frustration. If they wanted to discuss something negative about the school or homework practice, doing so with a peer might give them the ability to do so more confidently and freely. This is known as the “Risky Shift Phenomenon” (Kogan and Wallach, 1967, p. 75) , and is a significant strength of focus groups over interviews .

Furthermore, when interviewing students on wellbeing and homework, it allowed the researcher to bring up emotions in a balanced, informative and controlled way (Hendriks, 2007). This is especially important and necessary when dealing with younger children who may not be in full control of their emotions and feelings yet. As a teacher well known by staff, students and members of the community, the ethnographer had developed positive working relationships which allowed them to research younger participants skilfully due to the training and experience of working with younger children. This allowed the research to be carried out in such a way where students felt natural, safe and that they could be open and honest. Focus groups allowed students also to discuss, contradict and agree with each other that added further value and data production. It enabled them to have a “Space of resistance”, and also allowed them to “explore and enable social agency and collective

knowledge production” (Hyams, 2004, p. 106). Furthermore, with students talking about homework set and the school policy, focus groups enhanced students’ discussion of sensitive topics and helped more reserved members of the group to “break the ice”. As Hollander (2004, p. 608) noted, participants can “help each other to overcome embarrassment, provide mutual support in expressing feelings which are common in their group but which they might consider deviant from the mainstream culture”, and this dynamic was evident in different student groups.

The fact that the ethnographer was a long-standing member of staff, well-known by students and established within the school community, helped create a safe and trusting environment for interviewees. While relationships in schools are always varied and some students may feel more comfortable with an external professional, the researchers existing role meant that participants were already familiar with them, and this supported open discussion. This reflected the broader point that insider researchers can draw on existing relationships and contextual understanding, although these advantages depend on the nature of those relationships and must be approached reflexively (Tracy, 2010). Being embedded in the daily life of the school enabled me to build rapport with staff and students over time, which supported the kind of “Verstehen” (the empathetic understanding of another person’s perspective) that ethnographic work seeks to achieve (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). Understanding the norms and values of the school institution was crucial for this ethnography. An ethnographer who is fully embedded within a school provided much richer detailed data than relying on school reports or school data (Thomas, 2017).

Furthermore, ethnographies in professional contexts where the researcher was qualified in the field being researched were rare. Krang and Cook (2007), for example, illustrated where conducting ethnographies on plumbers or nurses where it was unlikely that the researcher will have had the qualifications or skill sets to completely participate or fully immerse themselves into the culture. Recommendations were to try and be as closely involved as possible, such as becoming a “Plumber’s Mate”, or assistant. However, even this did not give a full insight or understanding of the profession or the demands of the job. In the main research, the researcher was uniquely able to gain an insight and full immersion due to being a fully qualified and trained teacher and already interwoven within the school community. This will have added value and gained meaningful insights, and consequently a sense of “Verstehen”.

As well as reflexivity, the complications and implications of power dynamics needed to be addressed also. Teaching is, by its nature, a role embedded in institutional authority, and this creates power differentials that can influence how students respond in interviews and focus groups. Students may have felt pressure to present themselves in particular ways or may have assumed that certain views were more acceptable than others. Even refusing to take part in the research or withdrawing from it half way through might have posed concerns for students. Recognising this, the researcher approached the study with an awareness that their position could affect access, rapport, and the kinds of accounts students felt able to share.

However, insider status does not operate in a uniform way. As (Kee *et al.*, 2001) argue, researchers are never fully insiders or outsiders. Instead, positionality is fluid and shaped by

multiple factors such as role, age, status, and the specific relationships involved. The researcher's long-standing presence in the school and familiarity with its routines and culture supported rapport and helped create a trusting environment, but these advantages depended on the nature of existing relationships and could not be assumed. Some students may have felt more comfortable with an external professional, while others may have valued the familiarity of a known adult. Insider status therefore brought both opportunities and limitations, and these must be negotiated rather than taken for granted.

Furthermore, Berger (2015) similarly emphasised that a researcher's social position, experiences, and professional role can shape every stage of qualitative research, from access to interpretation. Reflexivity was therefore essential for recognising how the researcher's position may influence the data. Throughout the study, the researcher remained attentive to how their role as a teacher might have affected the dynamics of the interviews, the questions asked, and the meanings drawn from students' accounts. This included being alert to the possibility that students might withhold information they assumed the researcher already knew, or that the researcher might have unintentionally interpreted responses through the lens of their own professional experience.

To mitigate the influence of power, a few preventative steps were taken. Participation was voluntary, confidentiality was emphasised, and students were reminded that their comments would have no impact on their school experience. This included grades and possible sanctions. Interviews were conducted in neutral spaces, and students were encouraged to speak openly, challenge ideas, or decline to answer questions. These strategies did not remove power differentials entirely, but they helped to manage them and

reflected the need for continual reflexivity when conducting research from a position of institutional authority (Berger, 2015). Additionally, as the ethnography took place over an extended period of time, other staff and students would have seen that there were no positive or negative consequences from taking part in the research, and the opinions of the participants had no long-term impact on their experiences of school.

Taken together, these considerations highlighted that the researcher's insider position was both an advantageous asset as well as having an awareness of the potential power dynamics that might have been uncomfortable or a worry to some. It provided contextual understanding and supported rapport, but it also required careful attention to the boundaries between teacher and researcher roles. A reflexive approach was therefore essential for recognising how positionality shaped the research encounter and for ensuring that students' perspectives were represented as accurately and ethically as possible.

In addition, the researcher recognised that students might not have felt able to decline participation because of the inherent power dynamics of the teacher–student relationship. To mitigate this, participation was introduced by a member of staff who was not involved in the research, and information sheets made clear that choosing not to take part would remain confidential and would not be communicated to the researcher. Heads of Year announced the research in assemblies, and the form tutors then gave the information sheets to students during form time. If students wanted to take part, they would take the information and consent forms home and discuss with parents, and if they wanted to take part, would return with the consent forms filled out. It is only at this point that the researcher approached students to take part in the research. Students were given multiple

opportunities to opt out, including at the point of invitation, immediately before the interview or focus group, and during the session itself. In the debrief, participants were also told they had four weeks to remove their data from the research if they left the focus group or interview and changed their mind after reflection. These steps reflected the importance of attending to “ethics in practice” (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004, p. 261), where participants consent is genuine, voluntary and not merely part of a research procedure. Such measures were intended to make declining participation a realistic and safe option, reducing any perceived obligation arising from the researchers’ role, and to remove any worries of negative sanctions or consequences of refusal.

The same consideration of consent also applied to teachers who participated in the ethnography also, especially as a face-to-face volunteer sample was used. Although staff were colleagues rather than students, being approached directly by a researcher within the same institution can still create a sense of professional obligation. Being a Head of Department might compound this further as well. However, the dynamics were shaped by the researcher’s long-standing role as a union representative, which positioned me as an advocate for staff autonomy and professional rights. This identity helped to create conditions in which declining participation was both acceptable and expected. Information sheets emphasised that involvement was voluntary, unrelated to performance, and confidential, and teachers were given time to consider the invitation privately. These steps reflected the ethical principle of autonomy and the need to ensure that consent is genuinely voluntary rather than influenced by perceived obligation (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden, 2001). Teachers were also given the same opportunity to withdraw their data from the

study up to four weeks after taking part, allowing them time to reflect and providing them another opportunity to withdraw from the study.

5.3 PARTICIPANTS

There were two different sampling techniques used to gain participants in the study. For the teacher participants, an opportunity sample was used. This consisted of the researcher asking teachers to take part in the research via word-of-mouth and face-to-face interactions. A total of seventeen teachers out of the 75 the school employed took part (23%), with no teachers refusing to take part once asked. These teachers were interviewed individually in seventeen separate interviews. The researcher was conscious of researcher bias and so therefore made a conscious effort to include teachers where there was minimal interaction and networking. This was purposefully sought out so that there was also a wider scope of teacher experience from different subject areas, year groups taught and status within the school. The subject specialisms can be seen below in Table 3 (overleaf).

Table 3: Teacher participants - subject specialism and position

Subject	Position
Business and Law	Head of Year (HOY)
RE	Head of Department (HOD)
Psychology – PGCE Student	Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) trainee
Geography	Early Career Teacher (ECT)
Science	Teacher
Maths	2 nd in Department
Science	Teacher
Art	Head of Department (HOD)
Maths	Teacher
English	2 nd in Department
DT	Teacher
French	Head of Department (HOD)
Music	Head of Department (HOD)
English	Senior Leadership Team (SLT)
Sociology	Teacher
IT	Teacher
Sports	Teacher

As outlined above, there were a wide range of teachers in terms of subject and status within school. The research gained two teachers for English, Maths and Science due to their subjects being a core subject within the curriculum and therefore their departments would be larger. The researcher also ensured that there was a member of staff who was a trainee teacher (PGCE), an Early Career Teacher (ECT), and a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Furthermore, four Heads of Department and two Seconds in Department were interviewed due to their significant contribution to curriculum design and homework implementation within their chosen curriculum. Additionally, a Head of year (HOY) was also used from a pastoral perspective. Therefore, there was a vast diversity of staff experience, and this was purposefully sought in order to enhance the validity and future generalisability of the research. Further details such as the number of years teaching and the specific year

groups taught were omitted from the sampling data collection due to the risk of compromising anonymity and confidentiality, which in turn could have impacted validity if teachers felt that they might be identifiable (Guenther, 2009).

The second sample and sampling method refers to the students. Students were obtained via a volunteer sample where the HOYs were briefed on the study and they announced this research was going ahead in their assemblies. From this, students were handed consent forms from their form tutors in the following form time and these students then returned fully signed consent forms to their form tutors. This allowed most students in each year group to participate if they wanted to, with only the form groups with students the researcher taught omitted. These completed consent forms were then returned to the researcher. Collecting consent in this manner was done so that students felt little pressure or obligation to take part in the study for ethical reasons. It was practically viable also, as the researcher would not have had capacity to have gone into all assemblies and form groups. There were 35 out of 1,000 students (4%) who took part in the study. More students were asked; however some students did not reply and some students stated they did not want to take part in the study. The students were interviewed in either individual interviews, paired interviews, or focus groups of no more than five students. Between year seven to year eleven (eleven to sixteen years of age), the curriculum was similar for most students. In Key Stage 3 (years seven and eight in the current school), all students had an almost identical timetable. In Key Stage 4, students diversified and took different subjects for their GCSE qualifications, however, a significant part of their timetable was similar due

to all students taking GCSE English, Maths, Science, and having compulsory PE and RSHE subjects. However, in the Sixth Form, students took completely different pathways in terms of subject content, as well as assessment. The students and their subjects can be seen below in Table 4. The sample sizes above were above what was seen as a recommended sample size for a doctoral research project (Smith, 2015).

Table 4: Sixth Form students subjects

Subjects
H&SC, Law and RE
Sociology, English and Law
English, RE and Sociology
English, RE and Sociology
Law and Business
Law and Business
Business and ICT
English, Psychology and Applied science
English, Psychology and Applied science

As exemplified in Table 4 (overleaf), a variety of students were interviewed from various subjects to gain a fair reflection of the student population and their views of homework. Again, their different experiences of homework in these subjects were important, and therefore students were purposefully targeted due to their differing experiences. For example, students who studied Law and Business were BTEC students which mainly involved coursework and lower entry requirements and were more vocational style subjects. However, students who studied English, RE and Sociology were enrolled onto more academic courses which had higher entry requirements and were very exam dominated in terms of their final assessments.

Including both student and teacher participants strengthened the overall design of the study. Collecting data from these two groups enabled the research to capture the perspectives of those who set homework and those who complete it, offering a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of how homework practices influence wellbeing. Including multiple participant groups enhanced the credibility of qualitative research by allowing for triangulation of perspectives. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argued that triangulation supported a more robust interpretation of social phenomena (such as wellbeing) by drawing on different viewpoints. Similarly, Hammersley and Atkinson (2019) noted that ethnographic accounts are strengthened when researchers attended to the diverse voices within a setting rather than focusing on only a single narrative. This is one of the main rationales to include both students and teachers in this thesis. Considering these voices together allowed the study to identify areas of agreement, highlight points of tension and reveal blind spots that would not have been visible had only one group been interviewed.

5.4 INTERVIEWS AND QUESTIONS

After deciding that an ethnography was the research methodology that best suited this research, it was important to establish what type of interviews to conduct and the questions used also. It was decided that semi-structured interviews should be used as a way of balancing the need to have a set framework of questions so that interviews were on track and focused, but also allowed for elaboration and the ability to adapt when participants gave interesting responses. What was deemed as an interesting response and required to

be investigated further was one that revealed a new, significant or meaningful experience of homework and its impact on wellbeing (positively or negatively) that caught the researcher's attention (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). It was important to have this flexibility so that students and staff could also discuss what was important to them (Breakwell, Smith and Wright, 2012). A structured interview would not allow participants to diversify where necessary and this would have been somewhat limiting when researching a person-centred topic such as wellbeing. It is worth noting that this is a slight change to the previously conducted pilot study, where participants were asked open questions in an unstructured way. The original intention to use unstructured questions was to try and avoid researcher bias and imposed ethic via the researcher (Booth *et al.*, 2016), however, after the pilot it was concluded that changes were needed for the main research. The reason for the change here was that in the pilot study, the topic of conversation sometimes lost focus and at times was very loosely linked to homework and wellbeing. Additionally, there were times where there were awkward silences where the researcher was unsure what to move onto when the specific question had been answered. Therefore, a semi-structured interview was adopted to overcome these weaknesses and make the interviews flow as smoothly as possible. To overcome this effectively, a framework was made using a model set forward by Thomas (2017). This allowed for a semi structured interview with broad questions to allow scope and liberty for the participants to answer the questions. It also included prods, probes and follow-up questions made by the researcher should participants have little to say, or should they not understand the questions. An example of this can be seen in Table 5 (below) and the full list of questions with their prompts and probes in Appendix 5. An example transcript

of a student interview and a teacher interview can be found in appendix 6 and Appendix 7 respectively.

Table 5: Example of Semi-Structured interview questions for student homework type and wellbeing using Thomas (2017) Framework

Issue/ Topic	Possible Question	Possible follow-up questions (Prompts)	Probes
Effects on wellbeing	How does homework effect wellbeing in your view?	<p>What would you say the positive impacts of homework is?</p> <p>What would you say the negative impacts of homework is?</p> <p>When you are set homework, what do you typically think or feel?</p>	<p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>Do you still think and/or feel that later on?</p>

Throughout the ethnography, photographs were taken of students’ work or items that students or staff thought were key to their views of homework. Using photographs in combination with interviews is a process known as “photo-elicitation” (Harper, 2002).

Participants talking about photos in conjunction with their experiences can create a sense of their everyday school lives and experience of homework in schools (Harper, 2003). Students and staff discussing pictures that are relevant to homework improved and increased understanding of their experiences of how homework affects their wellbeing and will have

provided evidence to further justify and elaborate on their experiences. In some cases, participants were encouraged to take their own pictures prior to the interviews in a practice of autophotography. Taking this approach allows researchers to understand how the participants understand and interpret their world around them (Dodman, 2003; Pink, 2013). Participants were told not to take photographs or videos of themselves however, as this would feel inappropriate considering the age of the participants and potential concerns relating to safeguarding.

5.5 ANALYSIS

The results were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Reflexive thematic analysis was adopted because it aligned with the interpretivist perspective of this study and the aim of understanding how students and teachers made sense of homework and wellbeing within the specific school context (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Reflexive thematic analysis positions meaning as co-constructed and acknowledges the active role of the researcher in generating and interpreting patterns across the data (Braun and Clarke, 2019). This was important given the nature of the interviews and the ethnographic elements of the study, where participants' accounts were shaped through interaction rather than treated as objective data points. Alternative analytic approaches were considered but were deemed not appropriate. Coding-reliability forms of thematic analysis, which emphasise inter-rater agreement and coding consensus, assume a more positivist perspective that would have been inconsistent with the study's focus on subjectivity, context, and wellbeing as an individualised experience (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). As a sole researcher, inter-rater reliability procedures were not appropriate, as reflexive thematic

analysis rejects the assumption that multiple coders should converge on a single “correct” interpretation of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Content analysis was also unsuitable because its emphasis on frequency and categorisation risks losing the emotional depth of participants’ accounts (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Approaches such as grounded theory or interpretative phenomenological analysis were not adopted because the study did not seek to generate a formal theory or focus exclusively on individual lived experience (Charmaz, 2006). Reflexive thematic analysis therefore provided a flexible yet rigorous analytic framework that supported the study’s interpretivist stance and the complexity of school based wellbeing. Thematic analysis was used due to the significant amount of qualitative data gathered, as well as the desire to not quantify or create statistical analysis which can be the prime focus of other qualitative data analyses such as content analysis, for example (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas, 2013). The purpose of this results section is not to data ‘crunch’ or ‘reduce down’ the data as part of this analysis, but to broaden the data and tell the story behind the data to add value (Madden, 2023).

Additionally, as set out earlier, the concept of wellbeing being a unique and individualised experience means that there is a rejection to take a positivist approach and therefore thematic analysis seems more appropriate. A further rationale behind using thematic analysis was that the method was a lot more flexible compared to other qualitative data analyses, and thematic analysis has a considerable advantage over others due to how diverse and varied teaching can be compared to other professions (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Furthermore, thematic analysis is a qualitative analysis method used in the psychology field, and therefore is deemed as highly appropriate to use in this study when exploring student and staff interpretation of wellbeing and the effect of homework upon it.

This approach also allowed for the researchers understanding of the context to add value and contribute towards the themes that have been created, as opposed to a sterile, distant or objective researcher (Byrne, 2022). Thematic analysis allows us to include the 'context' and the understanding of the context by the researcher. Thematic analysis rejects the idea that there is a universal, underlying meaning and understands that the context being researched within is unique. Furthermore, it embraces researcher subjectivity and experience and allows this to add value to the research, rather than this subjectivity and being viewed as a problem and detrimental to the conclusions found (Smith, 2015).

When conducting the thematic analysis, a contextualised guide for conducting the analysis in an educational setting was used to aid and improve the overall outcomes of the research project (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Furthermore, to improve the validity of the thematic analysis, primary data was used as recommended by Clarke and Braun (2013).

The steps taken from Braun and Clarke (2022) to analyse the data were as follows:

1. Familiarisation – *Reading over the transcripts to gain an overall insight. To be completed before coding starts.*
2. Generate initial codes – *Deciding the coding type. An open or line-by-line, for example.*
3. Searching for themes – *Looking for significance and creating broader themes as more data is collected.*
4. Integrating themes – *Review and modify preliminary themes initially created.*
5. Define and naming themes – *Final refinement and links to sub themes.*
6. Producing the study – *Writing up the study*

Following these steps systematically resulted in transcripts to be read thoroughly and for the main themes and sub-themes to be established. Additionally, key and impactful quotes were not missed. It is also worth noting that the nature of the quotes, sometimes admittedly lengthy, gave the very essence of student and staff thoughts and feelings about homework. These quotes were included in full at times to ensure this essence was not lost and these participants had the platform of this main study to have their voices and views heard, which is a plausible rationale for conducting this research in the initial instance.

NVivo was selected over other software options because it was specifically designed for qualitative data analysis and is widely used in education research (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). Unlike some other data management tools, NVivo allows the researcher to work directly with multiple, uploaded full interview transcripts, attaching codes to specific segments of text and then retrieving and comparing these across all the uploaded transcripts. Its capacity to handle multiple interview types (individual, paired, and focus group interviews) within a single project made it particularly suitable for this study. NVivo also offered a more intuitive interface for coding and theme development than using spreadsheets or coding by hand, which would have made the process more cumbersome and less transparent (Richards, 2005).

NVivo also allowed for the creation of Word Clouds also. Word clouds have limitations that must be acknowledged when used within qualitative analysis. As they rely solely on word frequency, they remove the contextual and interpretive depth that is central to understanding participants' experiences (DePaolo and Wilkinson, 2014). As a result, visually

dominant words (towards the centre of the wordcloud) may not necessarily be the most conceptually meaningful, while less frequent but analytically important ideas can be minimised or overlooked. For these reasons, word clouds should be treated as a supplementary visualisation rather than a standalone analytic method. Despite their limitations, word clouds can offer multiple advantages when used appropriately within qualitative research. They provide an accessible visual summary of dominant language patterns, enabling researchers and readers to quickly identify recurring concepts within large datasets (DePaolo and Wilkinson, 2014). This can be particularly valuable at the early stages of analysis, where word clouds help surface initial areas of interest and prompt further exploration of emerging ideas. For this reason, a word cloud was generated for the start of the student and teacher results section. Furthermore, their visual format makes complex qualitative data more immediately interpretable for a range of audiences, including those less familiar with qualitative methods (Atenstaedt, 2012). When used alongside more detailed analytic approaches, word clouds can therefore enhance transparency, support theme development, and offer a visually engaging entry point into the data.

Using the practical guidelines recommended by Richards (2005), the interviews were imported and analysed in the process outlined below.

Data preparation and import:

The interviews with students and staff (all types; individual, paired, focus group) were audio recorded during the interview and then later transcribed. The transcripts were checked for accuracy by eliminating spelling errors, misunderstanding or wrong words and anonymised

with the participant codes (T1, S12Y7, for example) before being imported into NVivo as individual word documents. An example of an audio recording can be found in Appendix 9.

Initial reading and familiarisation:

The researcher read through each transcript within NVivo to become familiar with the content and to gain an overall sense of how participants talked about wellbeing and homework. All transcripts were read first before the coding stage started, so an overall and holistic understanding of student and staff thoughts and feelings on wellbeing was understood before coding started prematurely.

Initial coding:

As the transcripts were read, segments of text that related to wellbeing, homework, or connected issues (for example, stress, workload, time etc.) were coded. Codes were created inductively, based on what participants said, rather than being imposed in advance. NVivo was used to attach these codes to specific passages so that all instances of a code could later be viewed together.

Reviewing and refining codes:

Once initial coding was complete, the researcher used NVivo to review the list of codes, merge overlapping ones, and clarify distinctions between them. This involved comparing coded extracts across different students/teachers and interview types to see where patterns or differences emerged.

Developing themes:

Related codes were then grouped into broader categories within NVivo, which formed the basis for themes about homework and wellbeing. The researcher moved back and forth

between the coded data and the emerging themes, checking that each theme was firmly supported by what participants had said. .

5.6 ETHICS

With an ethnography being held within a school and conducted with children, ethics were a crucial consideration for the researcher (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2024). With these guidelines in mind, a research proposal was created and submitted to the University of Birmingham's Humanities and Social Science Ethical Review Committee and was given full ethical approval on the 19th April 2023. The reference number for this is ERN_21-0374A.

There were some ethical considerations that had to be specifically considered due to the multidimensional roles that the researcher would be undertaking. With the research being a university student conducting research for the EdD (Education Doctorate) and being a practitioner-researcher within a school with children aged between eleven and nineteen, special consideration was needed in terms of how to act and conduct this research sensitively. Although there were similarities within these roles, such as safeguarding of children (for the teacher) and safeguarding of participants (for the researcher), the roles had differing priorities. The researcher being a teacher meant priorities included students performing well regarding exam results, students growing interpersonally and completing professional duties. The researcher being a EdD student had alternative priorities such as interviewing staff and students by a set time, being a manager of the research project and completing the course. This meant that the researcher was constantly "Code Switching" between roles, adapting their stance and behaviour to suit different interactions in the field

(changing between the role of teacher, researcher, university student), much like a “chameleon” (Hendriks, 2007, p. 292). However, despite the need to move between these two roles, the researcher’s ethical responsibilities remained the same throughout. Safeguarding and participant welfare were central to the research process, and any disclosure that raised a concern about safety or mental health was reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) in line with school policy. This was not separate from the research but part of conducting it ethically, ensuring that participant wellbeing was prioritised alongside data collection (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). It is worth noting that no referrals were needed to be made to the DSL. .

When examining deontological ethics, careful consideration needed to be given to the power dynamics between the participants and the researcher. As a teacher within the school, the researcher occupied an insider position, with established relationships and an understanding of the school culture. This insider status brought advantages, such as familiarity with the school and its culture, as well as ease of access to the participants, but it also introduced ethical and methodological challenges, particularly around power, role expectations, and participant comfort (Mercer, 2007). The researcher, who is a teacher, had a status of authority over the participants who are students. This authority and power dynamic is enhanced further when adding in the roles of researcher and participant. Due to the participants being under the age of nineteen and a large proportion of participants being under the age of sixteen, these power dynamics needs to be considered. Some students may feel pressure taking part in the research and/or to give results that the researcher wants. Power in this school was not only positional, but relational. The researcher held institutional authority as a teacher, and this could have influenced how students interpreted

the invitation to participate, the kinds of responses they felt comfortable giving, and their sense of whether withdrawal was genuinely possible. Power also operated symbolically, as the researcher was associated with grading, behaviour management, and school expectations. These factors contributed to the decision to exclude students who were taught by the researcher. These dynamics required careful ethical consideration throughout the study (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004).

Addressing power dynamics not only makes the thesis more ethically sound, it reduced the potential to reduce validity. For example, researching students that the researcher taught would compromise the internal validity of the study by promoting demand characteristics, but it is also likely that these might have added additional pressures onto the participants. Participants might have felt uncomfortable giving answers which might have been negative towards the researcher and their colleagues or about the school themselves. Furthermore, participants might have felt that there might be later negative consequences in future which could affect their future grades or assignments as the researcher will potentially be assessing and marking these in their role as classroom teacher.

To address these concerns, the researcher ensured that participants were reminded throughout that participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw at any point during the study, as well as up to four weeks after data collection had ended, in line with standard ethical guidance (BERA2024). Each participant was allocated a participant number (T1, S1Y13, for example), which kept participant anonymous but also allowed them to use this to withdraw from the study. By keeping this participant number, it enabled them

to withdraw their data without needing to identify themselves directly, and they were also given the option to request withdrawal via email up to 4 weeks after their interview.

Mitigations were put in place to reduce the influence of the dual role of teacher and researcher. The researcher did not teach any of the students who took part in the study, which minimised the risk that participants might feel obliged to participate or fear negative academic consequences or school sanctions. Interviews were conducted in neutral spaces, and the researcher emphasised that negative views would not affect their schooling in any way. It was also explained that these views would not be shared with other teachers or students other than the final thesis, and in this thesis they would be anonymised with participant numbers to help shield their identity.

As participants were under eighteen and therefore considered vulnerable within a school context, both students and their parents or carers were provided with consent forms. This dual-consent process ensured that students had agency in deciding whether to participate, while also meeting safeguarding and institutional requirements. It also provided an additional route for participants to withdraw themselves or their data if they wished. By needing both parental and student signed consent, it allowed students the ability to not take part in the research even if their parents had consented. This layered consent was important so that students in particular had autonomy on whether they took part in the research or not.

These mitigations explained above were designed to reduce the impact of power dynamics and protect participant wellbeing. They were detailed in the ethics application submitted to the University of Birmingham Ethics Committee, and the proposed measures were

approved. The consent forms and information for participants can be seen in Appendices 1-4.

Another ethical consideration was that of anonymity. Staff and students identities were kept anonymous to fit in with ethical guidelines of anonymity, privacy and confidentiality (BERA,2024). The research therefore needed to be completed in such a way that participants remained unidentifiable in the final published thesis. To achieve this, students and staff were allocated participant numbers rather than abbreviations. Participants who were teachers had a T as the start of their participant number, meaning that they were referred to as T1, T2, T3 and so on. This approach provided a level of pseudonymisation that protected staff identities, which was important given that previous school-based case studies have shown that staff in smaller schools can sometimes be identified through initials or abbreviations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). Students were labelled using a format such as S1Y13. The S indicated they were a student, with the number indicating the participant and the Y indicating their year group. This system allowed the researcher to maintain an accurate record of which year groups had participated while still ensuring that participants were not identifiable in the published research. Although the researcher retained a separate record linking codes to individuals for safeguarding purposes, this was stored securely and was not accessible to anyone else, meaning that the published data remained pseudonymised. This was seen as a necessary compromise to ensure validity of the research as well as protecting participants (Saunders, Kitzinger and Kitzinger, 2015).

Ethnographies have additional and specific ethical guidelines to consider. Two branches of ethics for ethnographies must also be considered in addition to conventional ethics discussed above (Atkinson *et al.*, 2007). Firstly, consequentialist ethics refers to the need for the research to be beneficial to the researcher and participant. Secondly, deontological ethics refers to respect, equality and complete avoidance of harm for participants. When addressing consequentialist ethics, a negative consequence is when the research comes to an end and the ethnographer exits the participants' lives after such a long period of time. The risk of participants being adversely affected due to this reason was quite minimal, as after the research was completed, the ethnographer continued to be employed by the participating school in the same capacity as a teacher and therefore there was no risk of the researcher leaving after the completion and consequently no adverse effects on the participants. Furthermore, since the start of the research project, students have left the school to go onto their post-16 or post-18 destinations and have in effect left prior to the completion of the research project.

The chapter established how the thesis research was carried out and explained the practical and ethical decisions that shaped the research process. It showed how the chosen methods supported the aim of exploring different types of homework and their perceived impact on wellbeing, and how the approach allowed students and teachers to describe their experiences in detail. By outlining the steps taken during data collection and analysis, the chapter created a clear foundation for understanding how the findings were developed. With this methodological groundwork in place, the thesis moved on to the results, beginning with the perspectives of students.

6 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section presents the findings from the student interviews and focus groups, and explores how different types of homework are understood in relation to wellbeing. It introduces the themes that emerged from the students' accounts and explains how these experiences link to wider issues such as stress, motivation, time pressures, and the balance between schoolwork, extracurricular activities and personal life. The section also highlights the ways students described both positive and negative aspects of homework, showing how certain tasks supported their learning while others created what was viewed as unnecessary pressure. By setting out these perspectives, the section provides a clearer picture of how homework is experienced in everyday school life and prepares the thesis for the later comparison with teachers' views.

This chapter will focus upon the presentation of key quotes from students and staff in regard to their experiences of homework. It will be split into two halves, with the first half focusing on students' experiences and insights, and the second half focusing on teachers' experiences and insights. Main themes and sub-themes for each will be identified and key quotes and/or examples will be used to illustrate the importance of these themes. NVivo word clouds will be used to illustrate the proportion of comments students made so that there is a visual representation.

After completing interviews and taking photographs of homework assignments, these were read over multiple times to gain an overall understanding of the impact of homework on student and staff wellbeing. This stage reflected first phase of familiarisation with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022). After this initial insight was gained, a coding system was created using thematic analysis, where the researcher read over transcripts and started coding data and themes emerged. As the data were reviewed, subthemes also became apparent. Quotes were selected when they captured something important about the participants' experiences, expressed a point clearly in their own words, or reflected an idea that appeared across multiple interviews. In qualitative research, extracts are chosen because they help demonstrate the point being made and show how the analysis is grounded in the data (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Examples of interviews being coded in NVivo can be seen in Appendix 9 . These themes and subthemes were created, and significant quotes from each have been selected to display an insight into student and staff interpretation of the impact of homework on their wellbeing. Word clouds displaying frequently used phrases were used also to illustrate recurring and important feelings of the participants. An example NVivo coding tree can be seen in Appendix 10 .

The coding process was carried out using a reflexive thematic approach in which codes were generated inductively from the dataset while remaining guided by the concepts and themes outlined in the literature review (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Transcripts were read repeatedly to build familiarity, and line-by-line coding was used to capture both descriptive content and underlying meanings. Codes were then refined, combined, or separated as patterns became clearer across the transcripts. Over time , early conceptual links became apparent and this aided the allowed themes to be created (Saldana, 2025).

The literature review informed the process by providing familiar concepts (particularly those around workload, wellbeing and autonomy) which supported attention to theoretically relevant patterns without imposing a predetermined coding frame (Charmaz, 2025). This ensured that the analysis remained grounded in participants' accounts while still connected to the wider field. The codes generated in this thesis were broadly consistent with those developed during the pilot, which suggested that the patterns identified were consistent. This overlap also reflected what the literature review would predict, particularly in relation to workload, wellbeing, autonomy, and the pressures created by accountability.

Reflexive notes were used to examine how the researcher's positionality might shape interpretation and to make these influences visible within the analytic process (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Full transcripts were sent to the doctoral supervisor to show transparency of the process. The full dataset was revisited once the coding frame had stabilised to confirm consistent application and to ensure that no relevant data had been overlooked (Tracy, 2010).

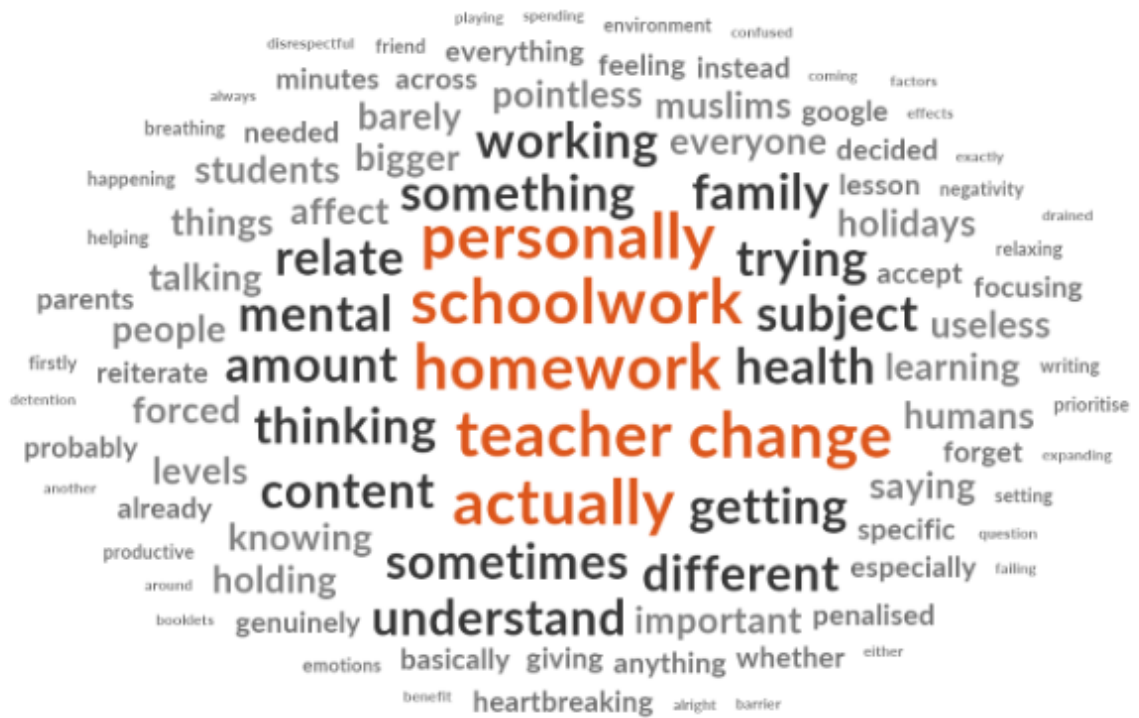
6.1 STUDENTS

Student interviews were transcribed and analysed using NVivo to support the organisation of the data and the development of recurring patterns related to homework and wellbeing. The initial coding process generated a wide range of meaningful codes, which were then interpreted and developed into broader themes. These themes are presented in a hierarchy

chart (Figure 7), which illustrates how related codes were grouped together during the analytic process. In total, seven students were interviewed in Year 13, five in Year 12, five in Year 11, five in Year 10, five in Year 9, three in Year 8, and five in Year 7, providing a deliberately balanced spread across year groups.

To introduce the student findings, Figure 6 presents a word cloud generated from the full dataset. Placing this at the start of the Results section provides an immediate visual overview of the language students used most frequently when discussing homework and wellbeing. Words such as *homework*, *schoolwork*, *mental*, *family*, and *teacher* appear prominently, signalling the areas that recur across interviews. Placing the word cloud at the start of the student findings provides an immediate visual of the language that frequently occurred in the interviews, highlighting the concepts students returned to most often when discussing homework and wellbeing. It offers a useful overview that frames the themes that follow and helps contextualise the patterns seen across the dataset. Word Cloud in Figure 6 (overleaf) was created using NVivo and setting a minimal word length to 6 letters and included up to a 'Specialisation' level of wording. This removed very short, common words that would otherwise dominate the word cloud.

Figure 6: Student Interview Word Cloud

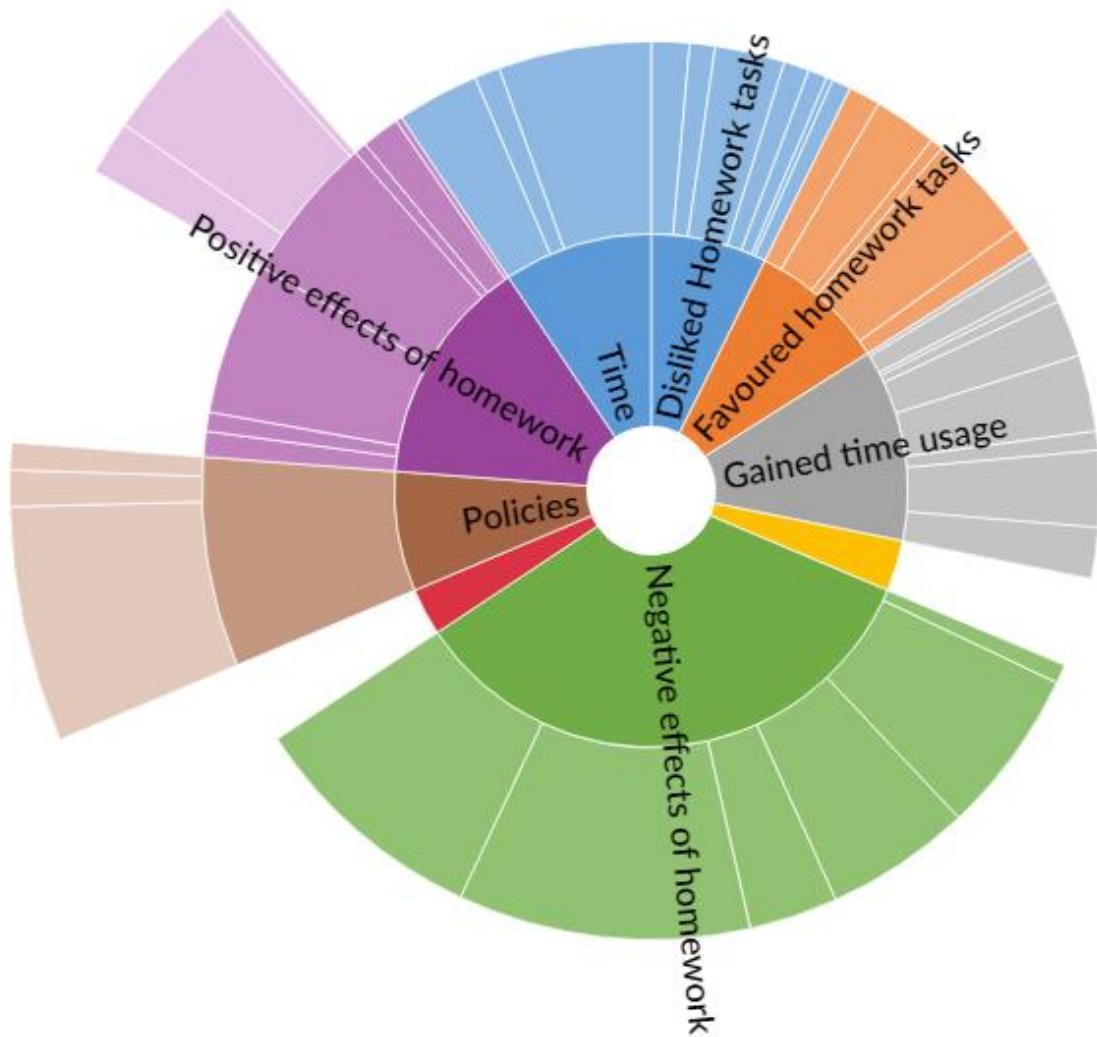


For students, there were 9 main themes relating to homework and wellbeing. The main themes and sub-themes for students can be seen overleaf in Table 5:

Table 6 – Student Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Pointless	Lack of Teacher understanding	Negative Effects of HWK	Dislike Homework Tasks	Positive Effects of Homework	Favoured Homework Tasks	Time	Policies	Gained Time Usage
Subtheme	X	X	Boredom	Coursework	Feedback	Apps and Websites	Homework Takes Too Long	Change Policy	Electrical Devices
Subtheme	X	X	Mood	Exam Questions	Gaining Knowledge	Creating Homework pieces	No Time For Extra Curricular	Keep Policy	Relax
Subtheme	X	X	Punishment and Sanctions	Extended Writing Pieces	Gain Skills	Exam Questions	Not Enough Time To Complete Homework	No Homework Policy	Revision
Subtheme	X	X	Sleep loss	Online Apps or Websites	Personal – Calming and Relaxing	Preparation Homework	X	X	Social Media
Subtheme	X	X	Stress	Preparation Homework	Personal – Positive Image and Self-Esteem	Revision	X	X	Socialising
Subtheme	X	X	Too Much Time Completing	Revision	Preparation for Next Lesson	X	X	X	Sport
Subtheme	X	X		X	Progress and Grades	X	X	X	X

Figure 7: Hierarchy Chart Displaying Dominant Themes from Student Interviews



6.1.1 Negative Effects of Homework

Figure 7 above displays the main theme was that of “Negative Effects of Homework”. Within this theme, there were subthemes that students identified and explained their views for the negative impact of homework.

Key quotes from students can be found in Table 7 towards the end of this subsection.

The first sub-theme for the negative effect of homework is 'Stress'. Over half of the students interviewed mentioned stress as a significant negative effect of homework.

S4Y13 goes on to explain how they felt stressed and felt a mixture of negative emotions due to homework. This was also experienced by a year 11 student (S26Y11), who explicitly spoke about feeling overloaded. S18Y10 stated how a variety of different homework contributes towards feeling stressed. The negative feeling of stress was felt throughout the school and younger age groups also felt the same. S16Y9 described how the feeling of stress applies to other as well, not just themselves. The intention behind setting homework by improving students attainment is not lost on the students, and is recognised by the students, but the ensuing stress seems to be consistent with all year groups as can be seen by S30Y7.

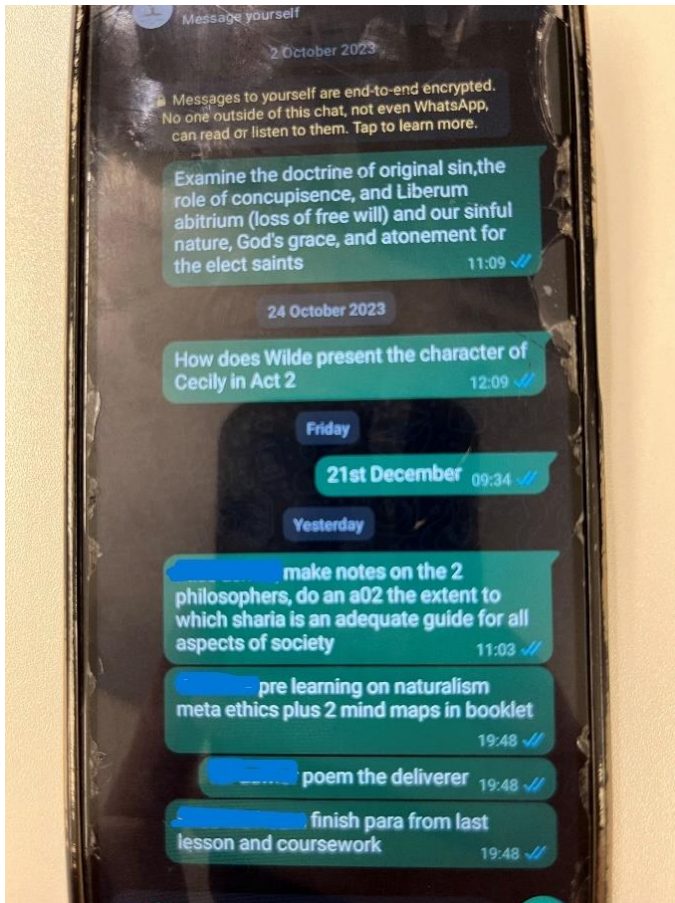
S3Y13 also went on to show an example of why they felt "Overwhelmed" with a picture of deadlines organised on their mobile phone (Figure 8 - overleaf). Below she explains how these deadlines made her feel overwhelmed and stressed:

"For me, I think it's about ... the pressure ... it can be overwhelming, especially when you have multiple deadlines ... for me, I've got five different teachers ... all five have said something that's due for the very same week ... sometimes that can be overwhelming."

This extract shows how the volume and timing of homework deadlines create a sense of pressure for S3Y13. Having "five different teachers" setting work for the same week results in various homework tasks overlapping, which S3Y13 repeatedly describes as "overwhelming". The need to "stay behind sometimes" indicates that the workload regularly exceeds the time available during and after school. This reinforces the pattern

across participants that it is the clustering of deadlines, rather than the difficulty of the work itself, that contributes to students feeling stressed and unable to keep up.

Figure 8: S3Y13 Mobile Phone Deadlines:



The next sub-theme is that of "Mood". Students describe how homework can have a negative impact on them emotionally and how this can be long lasting, such as S20Y10. S24Y11 states that homework, "It makes me sad." S25Y11 also concurred in the focus group and explained further by including feelings of depression. Other terms used by students include, "overwhelming", "draining"(S2Y13), feeling "burnt out" (S3Y13) and "angry" (S13Y9 and S20Y10). These negative emotions were felt lower down the school within younger age groups also (S32Y7).

The next sub-theme was that of “Sleep Loss”. S10Y12 explained how homework can result in a lack of sleep due to completing homework late at night. During one of the interviews, S2Y13 told the researcher of the lack of sleep (at the time of the interview) and high levels of sleep loss they had experienced, and also how that made them feel emotional and teary frequently. Other students talk about how the need to work late at night when others are sleeping. An example of how late this is comes from S11Y12, who states, “I’m awake when my whole family is sleeping and having to work in the darkness”.

This overlapped with another sub-theme of “Too Much Time”, where students believed that homework took too long to complete. S20Y10 explained how additional videos uploaded to help students struggling with homework increase the amount of time it took to complete homework further. S34Y8 also added to this by explaining how different assignments from different subject combine together to make homework last even longer.

A high proportion of students also discussed the negative effects such as, “Punishments and Sanctions”, particularly from lower school students. S30Y8 described how they miss free time if homework was not completed. Others described the effects of detention, such as S35Y8 who said, “sometimes I get detention from that’s really annoying”. S35Y8 went on further to say how the punishment was the worst part about homework. In one case, they described how they were given a negative “No Homework” stamp as a sanction. Students in upper school also dislike the punishments and S8Y12 made explicit links to mental health and wellbeing.

The final sub-theme was that of homework being “Boring”. Although this was the smallest sub-theme, there were some good examples of how students explained the negative effects

of homework. S15Y9 went on to explain how homework can be tiresome, with S27Y11 giving specific examples within subjects.

Table 7: Student quotes on the theme of “negative effects of homework”

Table 7	6.1.1	Students: Negative effects of homework
Sub-Theme	Student	Quote
Stress	S4Y13	“Personally for me, I go home and I'm just I'm just stressed I'm just drained. I'm just like, it's all the negative emotions in one.”
	S26Y11	“If you get too much it can stress you out ... it doesn't help your wellbeing ... it doesn't make you happy ... if you get too stressed out when you're trying to focus ... an overload of homework is bad for you.”
	S18Y10	“...make me stress a bit.”
	S16Y9	“It just stresses people out.”
	S30Y7	“Yeah, it could help you like revise and stuff but usually it causes stress.”
Mood	S20Y10	“Me personally just ruined my day to be honest.”
	S25Y11	“Science homework, it makes me very sad and upset and depressed. Because it's so hard. I don't enjoy it at all.”
	S32Y7	“I think sometimes it can put a lot of pressure on your shoulders ... it can lower your self-esteem ... maybe you could get some type of depression phase ... you can't ... focus enough on other things in your life.”
Sleep Loss	S10Y12	“However, some of the time spent on this homework is killing. I've been so hard to explain because there's some like homework. It can last up to 2am and I've started at 2pm is just crazy.”
	S2Y13	“When I'm sitting there ... sad doing my work – crying and doing my work – because I'm getting most things the next day ... I'm tired right now ... if I didn't have homework, I would sleep more ... I either sleep on the bus, do my

		pre-learning on the bus, or my homework on the bus ... I probably get more asleep.”
Too Much Time	S20Y10	“Especially when you don't understand this? You have to watch 20-minute video. So that just consumes more time?”
	S34Y8	“Some teachers, just force it back to read one hours and 40 minutes every week. And they also have to do homework, from one side for a math, the many more sets long so.”
Punishment and Sanctions	S30Y8	“If I don't get it done on time I get in trouble, and if I don't do it and like missing my break and that stuff?”
	S35Y8	“I think that my main point was ... punishment ... when they punish you for not knowing instead of helping you ... they give you ‘No Homework’ ... they just punish you and make you go away instead of helping you.”
	S8Y12	“People might not even do it and then get one hour detention ... that will affect your ... mental health because then you'd get a job with your parents and then you'd feel bad ... Homework is not good for your mental health.”
Boring	S15Y9	“Sometimes it becomes like a bit like a bit tiresome because some like I'll just write a bunch of paragraphs for like a piece of homework and it just gets very like repetitive over and over.”
	S27Y11	“Sport - so boring! And we go over exam questions on exams, pressure, that common sense, thinks we need to revise what we don't [know].”

6.1.2 Positive Effects of Homework

Extended student quotes on the positive effects of homework can be found below in Table 8 towards the end of this subsection.

The largest sub-theme within “Positive Effects” was that of ‘Gaining Knowledge’. Almost half of the students referenced this as a positive effect of homework. S15Y9 explained how it helps them to learn and prepare. S17Y9 agreed and expanded further by saying it can help if

you miss a lesson. Students of older year groups agreed and S23Y11 said how it help them feel prepared. Younger year groups also agreed with this benefit (S8Y12).

This links to the next sub-theme which is the “Personal” benefits, one of which is that of improving self-image or esteem. S10Y12 stated that, “a good grade it can make you feel good, make you boost your confidence.” Again, this was consistently explained throughout the year groups as S15Y9 stated, “it kind of boosts my self-esteem because I feel as if like, I’m ready for the next lesson because now I understand how to do it”. S17Y9 agreed also stating that it made them, “feel more like more positive about myself.”

S23Y11 explained how homework has helped them in the exam period and explained the positive impact during this key time. Students at the other end of the school also added positive comments such as S29Y7 who said, “It makes me feel smarter.”

Another positive personal benefit was that students can enjoy homework and how it helped to calm and relax students. When asked about the positive effects of homework, S16Y9 said they found homework “calming” and that is helps them as it “relaxes your mind.”

This was triggered by a comment that was made outside of the focus group, where the student called A-level English her “Pleasure subject”, due to the enjoyment of the homework given in this subject. They went on to explain how if the homework is set in accordance with the student’s interests, it can have deeply positive effects academically and on their wellbeing. S32Y7, who is at the opposite end of the school age range, explained how homework could be relaxing.

Another sub-theme was that of ‘Progress and Grades’. S10Y12 explains that, “homework is beneficial if you do it, and then you got a good grade it can make you feel good”. S28Y7 also

agreed by stating that, “It feels like I have advanced. I feel like I might get top marks.”

S8Y12 also discussed exam questions and how they can see themselves advancing.

A remaining and smaller sub-theme that was closely linked to grades was that of teacher ‘Feedback’ (S28Y7). Another sub-theme was that of “Preparation for the next lesson”.

S15Y9 explained how one homework piece made them feel more prepared for the following lesson. S19Y10 added: “And I think like it just helps me in my class because when I do my homework, I'm good in the class”.

Table 8: Student quotes on the theme of “Positive Effects of Homework”

Table 8	6.1.2	Students: Positive Effects of Homework
Sub-Theme	Student	Quote
Gaining Knowledge	S15Y9	“In my opinion, sometimes I feel like homework is good because it helps me understand the work even further and he helps me like, basically prepare myself for like the next lesson as well.”
	S17Y9	“I kind of think it's beneficial because ... it's the knowledge you need to know for the lesson ... just in case you miss out ... you get homework for it and then you do get the knowledge.”
	S23Y11	“I believe homework is good for us, because it helps our mind refresh on the work that we've been over. Which makes me happy. Because I know when I go to the lesson will be very good at it.”
	S8Y12	“It made me look smarter because you will have a greater understanding of how to do the work and you will find it easy to do other subjects as well.”
Personal	S23Y11	“Once you go home ... you realise you can actually do it by yourself and not with the teacher ... you feel more confident ... when it gets to the actual exam ... doing homework by yourself ... builds confidence.”
	S2Y13	“I like writing ... that whole first year ... enhanced my love for books ... and literature ... the little amount [of homework] we did ... let me express my personal pleasure in school ... I really <i>really</i> enjoyed it ... it was the best I've ever done academically, personally.”

	S32Y7	“My science homework, I did a presentation on one of the categories that I love to do. Just focusing on science. It's kind of relaxing. It's interesting.”
Progress and Grades	S8Y12	“Yeah, because teachers that they particularly base the exam style questions on the higher one and then we just forget about the other ones. So when you do that one first it makes you feel like confident and then you can move on to the high end.”
Feedback	S28Y7	“Homework can sometimes help you understand work? The teacher can, like, comment on what you need help on. So then you understand the subjects more easily.”
Preparation for next lesson	S15Y9	“And it can like prepare for your English lesson when you have to do this like basically the same thing. We have to write about a villain and stuff and you can get ideas from like the homework that you did.”

6.1.3 Disliked Homework Tasks

Students gave various examples and reasons as to why they disliked specific homework tasks. Selected extended quotes from students and their views of homework tasks they disliked are displayed in Table 9 towards the end of this subsection.

The next theme was exploring tasks that were disliked by students. Only a minority of students identified a specific homework task or type, however, “Extended Writing” tasks were the most discussed for this sub-theme (S15Y9). Extended writing under timed conditions was also disliked (S18Y10). S20Y10 began by saying that there were no homework types disliked but when probed, changed their mind and said, “Actually, no, I don't like writing essays.” Extended writing essays were also described as being unfair

(S33Y8). Another stated extended writing tasks do not get completed due to distractions (S4Y13).

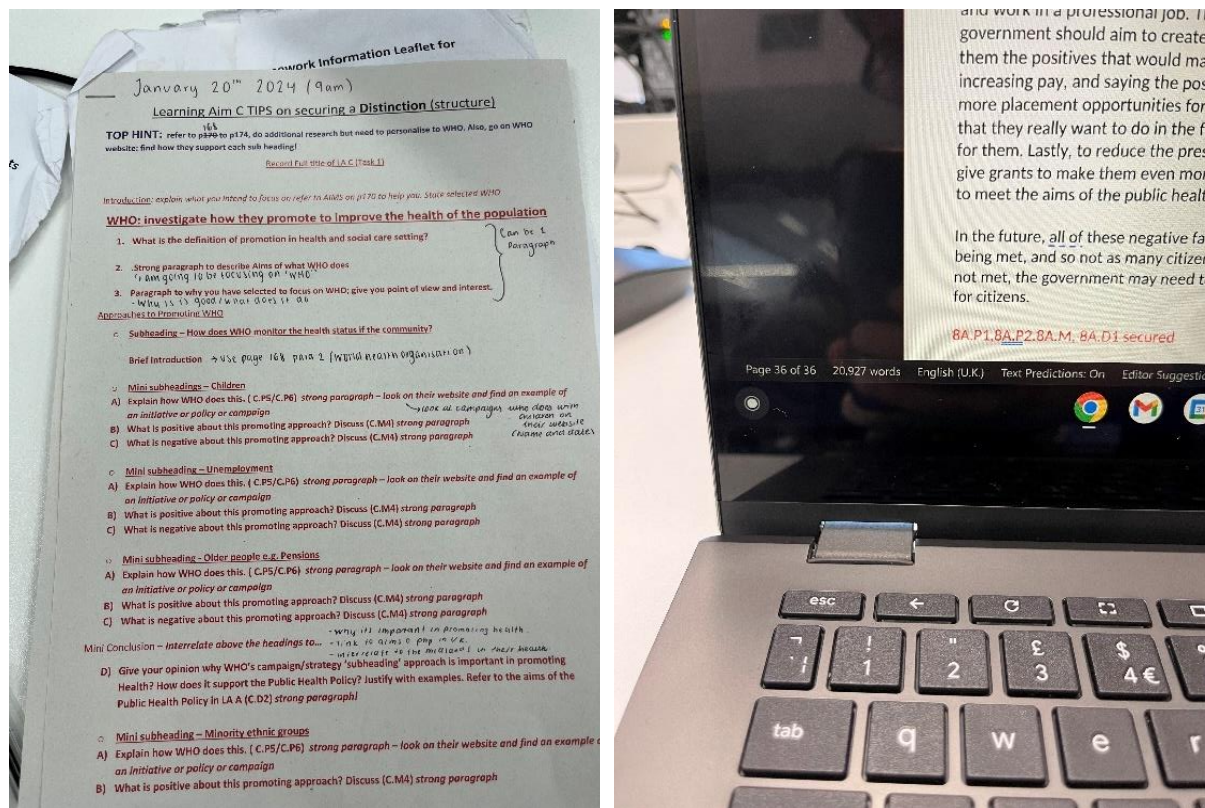
The next sub-theme is that of 'Online Apps or Websites'. S33Y8 explained how they prefer traditional paper based homework. S35Y8 stated specific apps that they disliked; "Mathswatch.", which was also stated by another participant who went on to explain how this was due to how time consuming it was to watch videos that take a long time to run (S20Y10).

Another sub-theme was that of 'Coursework', with one student speaking passionately about their dissatisfaction with this homework type (S10Y12). S11Y12 agreed and explicitly alluded to wellbeing within their comments. S11Y12 also provided pictures of their coursework assignment brief and how many words and pages they had written to illustrate their views in Figure 9 below:

"Coursework as well. Because in school I'm already in front of the laptop, would they then have to go home to also be in front of the laptop? ... I don't think that's good for my wellbeing because it can sometimes get draining ... doing the same thing for at least ... four hours every day ... going outside of school as well is draining."

This extract highlights how the nature of coursework itself contributes to feelings of fatigue. S3Y13 describes spending long periods in front of a laptop both in school and at home, which they link directly to a decline in their wellbeing. Their use of "draining" emphasises that the issue is not only the workload but the repetitive, screen-based format of the tasks. This reinforces the wider pattern across participants that homework demands extend the school day into the evening in ways that feel monotonous and exhausting.

Figure 9: S11Y12 Pictures of Assignment Brief and Word Count for Coursework



This was agreed by another student (S23Y11) who agreed with the sentiments above and how specifically coursework impacted their mood.

‘Exam questions’ was another identified sub-theme with a few students quotes falling within this sub-theme. Although one student could identify the good intentions behind the exam questions given to them, it ultimately had a negative impact on them (S16Y9).

Another small sub-theme is that of ‘Preparation homework’. One student described how they disliked pre-learning (S9Y12), and one (S8Y12) explaining why they did not like pre-learning specifically in one of their subjects.

The accounts above are both related to the amount of time and the short notice given for completing pre-learning homework, which may explain why relatively few students commented negatively on pre-learning tasks within this sub-theme. This is especially noteworthy as we move onto the next overarching theme of 'Preparation Homework' which was the most favoured type of homework to be set.

Table 9: Student quotes on the theme of "Disliked Homework Tasks"

Table 9	6.1.3	Students: Disliked Homework Tasks
Sub-Theme	Student	Quote
Extended Writing	S15Y9	"Sometimes it becomes like a bit tiresome because I'll just write a bunch of paragraphs for like a piece of homework and it just gets very like repetitive over and over."
	S18Y10	"Timed essays or whatnot because I'm trying to try and do my best."
	S33Y8	"I think essays because not everyone is great at writing. Not everyone has that strength everyone is different, and better at different things. So to give you all the same one and make you do the same thing is not really fair."
	S4Y13	"I wouldn't say negative but I think it would be better if we did not ... get like essays for English to do at home ... an essay is meant to take ... 75 minutes ... I'm not getting it done ... I've got 100 distractions ... it's impossible for me to sit and focus and get the essay done."
Online Apps or Websites	S33Y8	"I think that people like for example, if you get online homework, and paper homework. People are more likely to do the paper homework rather than online because they push it back and then they still get penalised."
	S20Y10	"Maths. Especially when you don't understand this? You have to watch 20 minute video. So that just consumes more time?"
Coursework	S10Y12	"The one that has the worst effect of coursework? Because, like he said, if you miss one day, you're basically finished. Catching up is the worst mental torture."
	S23Y11	"Sport coursework ... we were in school for like one day ... for five hours and we just take courses all day and they expect us to

		go back home ... your brain just gets tired ... gets you in a bad mood and you can't really focus ... you just overload the same thing over and over again."
Exam Questions	S16Y9	"Exam questions because they may be preparing me for an exam, but I may not know the question, or like what type of exam it is, so I'll be stressed about it."
Preparation Homework	S3Y13	"The whole subject is pre-learning, like you get the pre-learn that you go for in class but even when I'm going through it and close I mean sorry. Even when I've done that at home, I don't understand it. I just do it because it needs to be done."
	S8Y12	"For example if we have psychology a single lesson then we don't do any pre learning but if it is the next day we have a double lesson. And then we haven't done the psycho psychology pre-learning. I think then it's too much."
	S9Y12	"But then, like revision one is sometimes due the next day, so I have to quickly do it. And it's like every single day I have to do for each subject. So like I'm on top of it."

6.1.4 Favoured Homework Tasks

Students who also gave some examples of homework tasks that were liked or preferred. Key student quotes can be found in Table 10 towards the end of this subsection.

This theme explores the types of homework tasks students would prefer to be set due to them having a positive effect on their wellbeing. Similar to 'Disliked Homework Tasks', not many students identified specific homework types that they preferred. For example, the first sub-theme received fewer than half of students mentioning a preference for it. The first sub-theme was that of 'Preparation homework'. S20Y10 explained how it is less time consuming compared to other types of homework, and S2Y13 explained specifically why they prefer this pre-learning homework type.

The next sub-theme was that of 'Creating Homework Items'. S14Y9 explained why they enjoyed creating PowerPoints, for example. This was also brought up in a separate interview, where S15Y9 also went into detail about how they enjoyed being creative.

This type of homework was appreciated by various year groups, with S31Y7 also adding specifics to the process of creating items.

The next sub-theme is that of 'Apps and Websites'. S11Y12 explained why they are the best homework type for them, "I think those suit me the best because I'm able to, obviously go online and be able to get help as well". S13Y9 also details how they are helpful with the purposefully selected videos. Again, this is spotted throughout the year groups, with S19Y10 also concurring saying they like the instant feedback.

A few students mentioned 'Exam Questions' as a sub-theme. With S21Y10 stating their preference, on paper compared to the use of Apps above. Student S9Y12 also agreed but interestingly mentioned just the shorter questions specifically.

The final sub-theme that was mentioned was that of 'Revision' exclusively by students who had exams. S6Y13 stated they want, "homework that will help you with revision and exams." This also included internal testing, "End of topic tests so they could revise for that as well."

Table 10: Student quotes on the theme of "Favoured Homework Tasks"

Table 10	6.1.4	Students: Favoured Homework Tasks
Sub-Theme	Student	Quote
Preparation Homework	S20Y10	"I like doing research because like I get to learn new things. It's not that very time consuming. And yeah, it isn't. Who doesn't like learning new things?"

	S2Y13	“The one that I actually enjoyed the most is Mr. X’s RE pre-learning ... of all my subjects, it’s the one that I engage with ... I do it properly ... I feel like I’ve done something ... he gives us the pre-learning for the new topic and the first thing he’s going to do is a Socratic [quiz] before teaching it ... we can see how we’ve learned from our pre-learning, which I find really really useful ... it’s my most favourite ... of all my work that I get, it is his.”
Creating Homework Items	S14Y9	“English homework ... we had to do a PowerPoint about the Ghost of Christmas Present ... I kind of enjoyed doing it ... I can search up synonyms ... happy, sad, cheerful ... apparition ... it’s an opportunity to learn different words, and I kind of enjoy that.”
	S15Y9	“Creative homework tasks ... for example in English we had this task to do a poster ... about a certain villain that we like ... write about them, draw some pictures ... I think that’s really creative ... it personally made me want to do it ... because it’s more of a not-really-a-test.”
	S31Y7	“PowerPoints ... I can really express myself ... you can put photos ... transitions ... effects ... you can type stuff up ... read it and put it into your own words ... that’s really creative and ... I can express myself with it.”
Apps and Websites	S13Y9	“I think like Maths, because like if you don’t understand that you could fall on an app or something on YouTube or something like that to watch and like there’s like a full detailed video of that how to do something and I think is that more practice for you to understand, like, something that you don’t understand.”
	S19Y10	“I prefer online. because when I get the answer wrong, either like teach me how to do it or like show me like the answer - the correct answer. So, I can try again until I get that answer. And I’ll try again on the next question.”
Exam Questions	S21Y10	“So just like just a simple piece of paper with exam like questions. I feel like that’s way more helpful than a booklet.”
	S9Y12	“And also like going to going and also past paper questions when they are, like six marks, four markers, two markers, those help as well.”

6.1.5 Time

Key quotes from students linked to the theme of “Time” can be found in Table 11 towards the end of this subsection.

The next theme is ‘Time’. This is mentioned multiple times and overlaps with other themes and sub-themes. The first sub-theme is “Not Enough Time to Complete Homework”.

S10Y12 explained how there was little time to complete set assignments. S13Y9 also agreed with the lack of time due to other commitments. S16Y9 added to this by saying that this lack of time to complete homework also added to stress levels. S18Y10 stated that they enjoyed and wanted to do homework but they needed the proper amount of time to complete it: “I do like homework but don’t want it to be due tomorrow. I want time to [do] it.”

Another sub-theme of note within ‘Time’ is ‘Homework Takes a lot of Time to Complete’.

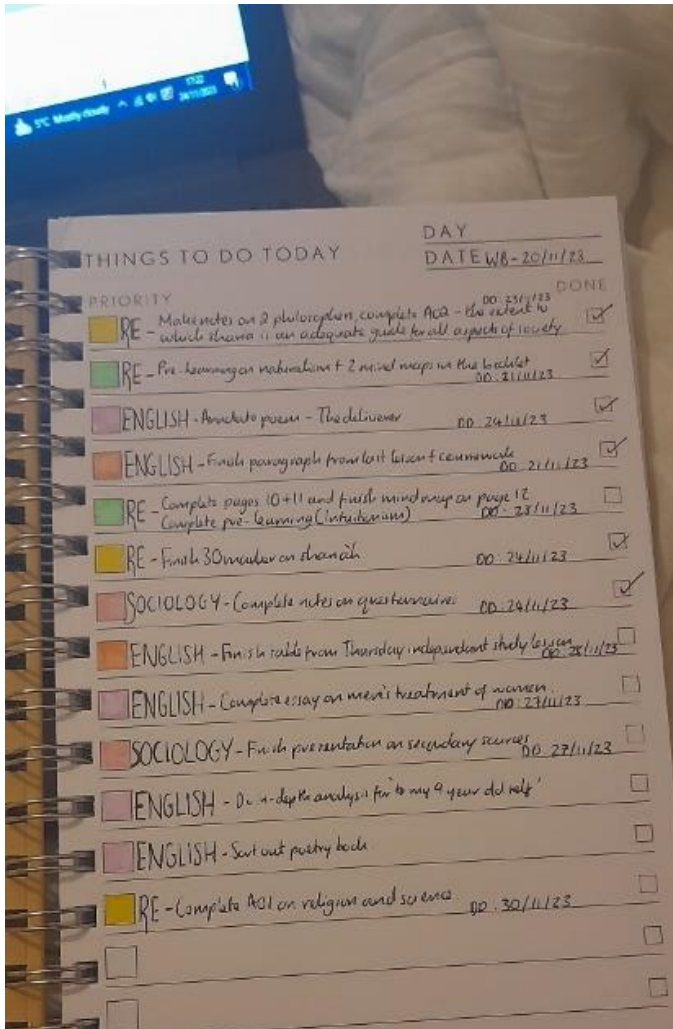
S10Y12 gave examples of the importance of time management as it was easy for a student to fall behind with their deadlines. S19Y10 continued to explain that even if they understood and felt they were good at a subject, it still took a significant amount of time to complete the work. S17Y9 enjoyed the work they were given but notes, “I mean, I do [*sic*] – it is just really long sometimes.” .

In one interview, S2Y13 explained how they do not have time to complete multiple subjects of homework. They also explain how each subject has multiple teachers, and how they can be set multiple homework per subject which exacerbates the issue further. Their extended and passionate extract below also links with Figure 10 (overleaf):

“I think for me, it comes down to the workload ... if I show you my notes ... I've already got four pieces for this week ... from now till Friday we're gonna get more set ... that's probably gonna go up to about eight or nine things I have to try and get done within this week ... it all comes down to workload for me ... it's all about time management ... going home and working till like 8:00[pm], 9:00[pm] ... then going to bed at like 1:00[am] or half past sometimes.”

This extract shows the sheer volume of homework S2Y13 is expected to complete within a single week. By Tuesday, they already have four tasks due, with the expectation that this will rise to “eight or nine” by Friday. Their decision to physically show their homework schedule reinforces the intensity of the workload. The student links this directly to working late into the evening, sometimes until 8–9pm, which then pushes their bedtime to 1am. This highlights how the accumulation of tasks across the week leaves little realistic time for rest or personal time and demonstrates how homework demands extend well beyond the school day in ways students find difficult to manage.

Figure 10: S2Y13 Homework Plans



What was insightful with Figure 10 above was the volume of homework tasks and the time on the clock that can be viewed on the laptop screen. S2Y13 was clearly working way beyond school hours and still had not completed their work, thus illustrating evidence for the realistic lack of time to complete all of their homework.

Table 11: Student quotes on the theme of “Time”

Table 11	6.1.5	Students: Time
Sub-Theme	Student	Quote
Not enough time to complete homework	S10Y12	“I have to get ready to go to football, and then when I come back ... I have to stay up ... another factor is sleep — you don't get enough sleep ... when homework is being set and you have no other choice to do it for coursework.”
	S13Y9	“You get home and then you get no homework. And you get detention. Like for what, just because I didn't have enough time, obviously, because you have other stuff to do at home.”
	S16Y9	“In my view, it may seem stressful because there's like a due date and that may affect me as I may rush it and may not get it done in time.”
Homework Takes a lot of Time to Complete	S10Y12	“You could get multiple different homework ... one coursework ... one exam-type question ... I feel like you should prohibit only one type of homework for each lesson ... once it starts stacking, it ruins time management ... there's outside factors and outside lives, and everyone does something different.
	S19Y10	“Sometimes no, it's a bit of a drag like because when I get home, I want to do to my own revision and work. And homework just takes up time, even when like, I understand the topic, and I'm like, it's just like the same thing every single time. It's like repetitive. So, like sometimes it's a drag, right?”

6.1.6 Gained Time Usage

It seems pertinent to address the next theme, which is looking at what students would do if they completed their homework and gained time. The main sub-theme here was that of ‘Socialising’. S1Y13 states:

“I think spending time with my family, or like just doing normal things that just could be like even going out shopping? I can't do that because I may have work to do.”

S20Y10 stated , “You know I could play with my friends”, which was a common theme that ran throughout each of the age groups interviewed. S28Y7 replied, “Play outside, maybe go to the park or play in my garden”, which is similar to S30Y7 who explained, “I guess play with my family like go and play with my brothers and go out more instead of like staying in or do more homework.” S33Y8 considered what other students would do and replied in a similar vein: “With that time people can like spend outside with their family or their friends.”

Some students responded to the next sub-theme, which was ‘Revision’. For example, S18Y10 was very focused on their studies and would still use their time focusing on them: “I would still revise because I think it's very crucial.” Older students who have exams stated they would revise for these, such as S23Y11 who stated: “I would be revising other subjects, things that might be struggling with for example.”

Another sub-theme was that of ‘Relaxing’. S19Y10 stated: “I probably just revised like a home or I just like chill, like, because I don't want to like, like do homework every day.”

S33Y8 also concurred and added, “With that time people can like spend outside with their family or their friends or just relaxing.”

‘Sports’ was another sub-theme within gained time, where students cited activities; for example, basketball (S16Y9), football, riding a bike (S20Y10), and sport's importance “sports is good for humans” (S28Y7).

Arguably a less positive sub-theme was using “Social Media”. S15Y9 stated: “YouTube videos, I guess. No one would really be like worrying about school afterwards.” S16Y9 also

adds, “use my phone, scroll through Tik Tok”. This was mentioned higher up the school also, by S9Y12 who said, “checking stories on Snapchat or Instagram and seeing people have fun.”

6.1.7 Lack of Teacher Understanding

A theme related to homework that was detrimental to wellbeing was that of a Lack of Teacher Understanding. S10Y12 stated: “there's other factors like your outside life that sometimes doesn't get put into consideration.” S13Y9 explained a negative experience where the teacher did not show empathy, “I didn't get time to do it because it was like family problems or like there was something that was bigger than the homework.” S34Y8 agreed, by stating: “if we've done homework the whole time, we miss one day for some reason – I think they should give us slack.” S2Y13 went further and explained that teachers did not understand the demands of multiple subjects: “I feel like they don't actually understand how hard it was to get that doing so they just like essays that we get in English.”

6.1.8 Pointless

Key quotes from students linked to the theme of “Pointless” can be found in Table 12 towards the end of this subsection.

This theme was covered in the pilot study prior to the present study and it has resurfaced again. Some students disliked homework and believed it is ‘Pointless’, which consequently impacted their wellbeing as they were completing work that held little value (S11Y12). S14Y9 also explained the process of completing homework whilst believing it to be pointless and having little purpose or benefit.

Table 12: Student quotes on the theme of “Pointless”

Table 12	6.1.8	Students: Pointless
Theme	Student	Quote
Pointless	S11Y12	“You're getting homework, something that you know the topic on, then it's pointless. And that is for homework that is forceful.”
	S14Y9	“Sometimes homework can be ... a bit useless ... you have Google and stuff ... even if you can't copy and paste you can just type the answer in ... you'll find the answer ... sometimes I think it's useless.”
	S21Y10	“So even if we do it at home, and it just makes sense that we're in school we give in, we've done it, but it's not like we understand it. So, there's not there's not really a point. So it's like, we're just writing down something we don't even know what I'm going to learn from so after like, that's just a waste.”

6.1.9 Policies

Key quotes from students linked to the theme of “Policies” can be found in Table 13 towards the end of this subsection.

The final theme for students is in regard to “Policies”. Within this, there are three sub themes of; ‘Change’, ‘Keep’ or ‘No Homework’. Remarkably, almost half of students wanted to explicitly make changes to the policy.

Regarding ‘Change’, one of the most dominant answers was removing detentions and other sanctions. S14Y9 stated: “No detentions, because it just gets me angry”. Others understood the value of homework but wanted it less often (S20Y10).

S33Y8 wanted to remove sanctions, such as the “No Homework” stamp which was part of the school policy. The comment by S14Y9 about homework making them “angry” was especially compelling, as the same student wanted to keep homework despite having a dislike for homework. Despite the negative emotions surrounding homework, they still stated that they do “need” homework, which implies they see a long-term value. This viewpoint was also shared by students at the other end of the school, such as S30Y7, who wanted to change the frequency in which it was set. Others would prefer an optional homework policy (S24Y11).

For the sub-theme of ‘Keep’, when asked if they would want any changes to the current policy, some responded, like S17Y9, to state – “Not really.” S19Y10 was happy with the amount they received and therefore did not see a need for change. S9Y12 who undertook exams, saw the need to keep homework to help with their future assessments.

The final sub-theme of ‘No Homework’ was surprisingly small. Only a handful of students desired a ‘No Homework’ policy, as S13Y9 stated: “Can I say something? On behalf of everyone. I feel like we shouldn't really have homework.” This was a stand-alone comment as this was the only interviewee who expressed aloud such an opinion about having no homework at all, although this opinion was expressed in milder terms by others.

Table 13: Student quotes on the theme of “Policies”

Table 13	6.1.9	Students: Policies
Sub-theme	Student	Quote
Change	S20Y10	“To be honest I think homework, I think we do need a bit of homework. But it's not every single day, a new homework. So I think you'd have it on rare occasions.”
	S33Y8	“I think I will change the penalty. Like if you keep on like, you know how if you don't do homework for a lesson, you know, you get a “No Homework” straight away.”
	S14Y9	“Because I hate homework but at the same time, we do kind of need to but not It's not everyday homework.”
	S30Y7	“I didn't really know. But I guess I could have like, less homework during the weeks. I think I could do like a homework every two weeks or two homework.”
	S24Y11	“I would make it optional. Because, as I said before, some people don't have time to complete your homework, maybe they have other stuff. And if you want to do you can go ahead and do it.”
	Keep	S19Y10
S9Y12		“Not really because homework does help because like, it just helps you revise and keep in your head and then like I know, revision as well.”

6.1.10 Word Cloud and Student Conclusion

The final part of analysing the results with NVivo is to look at Word Cloud from the start of the chapter and incorporate this with the themes identified to make a sound overall insight into the effects of homework on student wellbeing.

Research Question 1 — What types of homework do students perceive as having a positive or negative impact on their wellbeing?

In addressing research question 1, the findings presented in this section reveal a complex and often contradictory picture. As illustrated in Figure 6 previously, the word cloud generated from students' responses is dominated by terms with negative connotations, reflecting the stress, pressure and frustration associated with their homework experiences. Students described spending substantial amounts of time on homework, often at the expense of their mental wellbeing, leisure time and opportunities to relax or socialise. Some tasks were described as 'pointless' or 'useless', yet still completed out of obligation or fear of sanctions. They emphasised the need for homework to be predictable, well planned and realistically timed so that they could organise their workload and manage their wellbeing more effectively. They also highlighted the importance of homework being purposeful and positive, with a clear explanation of its value. Importantly, however, the data indicates that no single type of homework is universally experienced as either beneficial or detrimental to student wellbeing. This was the same across year groups and subjects. Instead, students' interviews and discussions point to the significance of how homework is designed, communicated and implemented. This insight provides an important foundation for the model developed later in this thesis, which focuses on the foundations of homework should be set or created.

The student findings showed that homework had a varied impact on wellbeing, with some tasks offering a sense of progress or confidence while others contributed to stress, frustration, or a loss of personal time. Students described clear differences between homework that felt purposeful and homework that felt repetitive, rushed, or disconnected from classroom learning. Their accounts also highlighted the importance of time, support,

and clarity, all of which shaped how manageable or overwhelming homework felt. These insights provided a detailed understanding of how students navigated homework in their daily lives and created a foundation for examining how teachers viewed the same practices.

6.2 TEACHERS

This section presents the findings from the teacher interviews and explores how staff understand the relationship between homework and wellbeing. It introduces the themes that emerge from teachers' accounts, including their concerns about workload, expectations, teacher as well as student stress, and the pressures created by school policies. The section also considers how teachers describe the purpose of homework and the challenges they face when trying to balance academic demands and school pressures with the wellbeing of themselves and that of their students. By outlining these perspectives, the section provides a clearer view of how teachers interpret homework within their daily practice and sets up the comparison with the student findings.

The interviews were transcribed and analysed using the NVIVO software to generate reoccurring and dominant themes regarding the homework and wellbeing of teachers. The main themes which emerged can be shown in a hierarchy chart overleaf in Figure 12. These themes will be explored with example extracts from teacher interviews. Most coded themes had sub-themes running underneath and had layers that were explored further. Teachers did not have additional layering of identification like students. This was purposefully done in

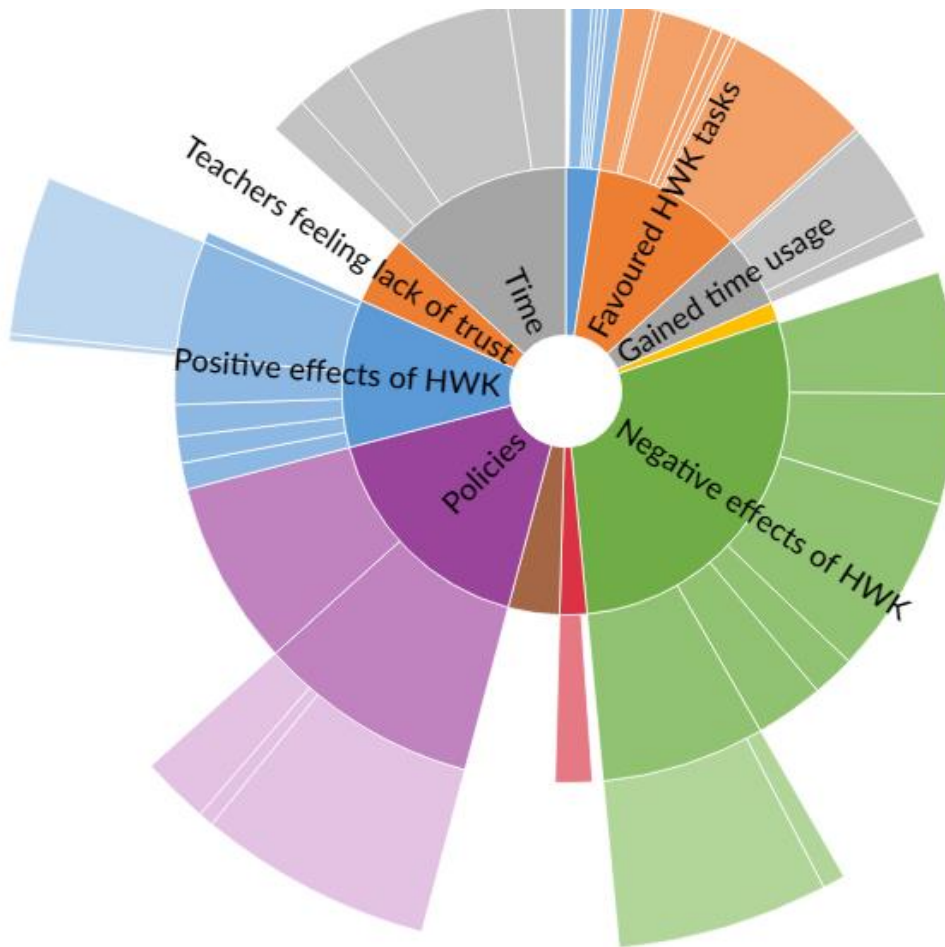
this way as it would be easier to identify teachers in the smaller school.

To introduce the teacher findings, Figure 11 presents a word cloud generated from the full set of teacher interviews. This provides an immediate visual overview of the language teachers used most frequently when discussing homework. Prominent terms such as *homework*, *activity*, *amount*, *knowledge*, and *change* indicate that teachers often framed homework in relation to task design, curriculum expectations, and the volume of work set. The presence of words like *parents*, *pupils*, *professionals*, and *timetable* reflects the wider organisational and relational context in which teachers make decisions about homework. Presenting the word cloud at the outset helps to frame the themes that follow and offers a concise visual sense of the concepts that dominated teacher accounts.

Table 14 – Teacher Themes and Sub-Themes

Theme	Teachers Feeling a Lack of Trust	Pointless	Homework not checked	Performance Management	Negative Effects of HWK	Dislike Homework Tasks	Positive Effects of Homework	Favoured Homework Tasks	Time	Policies	Gained Time Usage
Subtheme	X	X	X	X	High Marking	Extended Writing	Independent Learning	Self-Marking	Lots of Time Marking	Conforming to Policy	Improving lessons
Subtheme	X	X	X	X	Follow up Admin	Worksheets	Improves Lessons	Pre-learning	No Time in Lesson	Change Policy	Personal time
Subtheme	X	X	X	X	High Workload	None	Effective Feedback	Experiences and Activities	Lots of Time Completing Homework	No Homework policy	X
Subtheme	X	X	X	X	Limited Progress	Online quizzes	Enjoyment	Reading	Lack of Time to Mark Homework	Keep Policy	X
Subtheme	X	X	X	X	Lack of Extracurricular	Research Tasks	Reduce Workload	Recap / Revision	X	X	X
Subtheme	X	X	X	X	Stress	X	Progress	X	X	X	X
Subtheme	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Figure 12: Hierarchy Chart Displaying Dominant Themes from Teacher Interviews



6.2.1 Negative Effects of Homework

Key quotes from teachers linked to the theme of “Negative Effects of Homework” can be found in Table 15 towards the end of this subsection.

As can be identified by the above hierarchy chart, the most dominant theme that was spoken about was that of experiencing negative effects of homework. When exploring further, these negative effects included follow up admin, high amounts of marking, high workload, the hindering extra-curricular activity, having little impact on progress, as well as personal consequences such as increased pressure and stress.

Examples of 'Follow Up Admin' came from T13, who explained the long process of addressing those who did not complete homework and followed the school policy. This same issue appeared across teacher accounts also . The subsequent implications of this administration had a detrimental effect upon staff wellbeing. With regard to detentions, in order to cut down on the administrative work related, extensions were given to students, however, avoiding this administrative work also had negative connotations directly linked to wellbeing, as this "would mean extra stress and extra work" (T2).

Another sub-theme was that of "High Marking". This issue was raised repeatedly across the teacher interviews, suggesting it was a meaningful concern . T14 illustrated this particularly clearly, explaining how it affected their own wellbeing.

A similar sub-theme to high marking is "High Workload", which also negatively impacted the wellbeing of teachers. T4 explains how high workload was increased by combining marking, admin and the effects on workload and consequently wellbeing.

A further sub-theme was related by stating that homework had "Little Impact on the Progress" of their students, and therefore was not worth experiencing the above identified caveats (T13).

T1 questioned the value of certain types of homework, asking 'what is the value of some homework that is 10 multiple choice questions?' and describing how they sometimes spend time 'just ticking and flicking' through such tasks. This critical stance reflected a wider pattern across the interviews, where some teachers were already actively thinking about the purpose and impact of homework before taking part in the study. T1's comments therefore

illustrate the broader concern from teachers about whether varying forms of homework meaningfully support learning or wellbeing.

These concerns led some teachers to reflect more broadly on the purpose of homework, particularly when they felt it encroached on students' time outside school. For these teachers, certain tasks risked limiting students' opportunities for rest, play, or other meaningful activities, prompting them to question whether such homework should be set at all.

Another sub-theme at this stage was the worry that homework reduced students' opportunities to take part in extra-curricular activities such as exercise, sports, hobbies, or other childhood-based experiences (T13). These concerns led some teachers to reflect on whether certain homework tasks genuinely supported learning, or whether students might benefit more from time spent developing interests and skills outside the classroom.

The final but highly significant sub-theme within Negative Effects of Homework was "Stress". Many teachers described homework as having a negative personal impact, particularly when setting, collecting, or marking it. One teacher explained that stress arose not only from the marking itself but also from the administrative demands associated with managing homework (T15). Importantly, teachers emphasised that this stress was not limited to interactions with students - it also circulated within the school structure. T11, a Head of Department, described feeling pressure when leading and monitoring homework practices within their team, illustrating how expectations around homework could generate stress between staff as well as between teachers and students.

Table 15: Teachers quotes on the theme of “Negative Effects of Homework”

Table 15	6.2.1	Teachers: Negative Effects of Homework
Sub-theme	Teacher	Quote
Follow Up Admin	T13	“Homework has been 50% or more completed ... they know that if they don't do it, they're going to get a no-homework stamp ... I should be monitoring it and setting detentions for those persistently not doing it ... but it is so difficult to put those detentions in place and refer them onwards ... I found it really hard to monitor who hasn't done the homework and then set detentions, so I've let that drop.”
	T2	“So that caused more anxiety for staff, more anxiety for the students who had completed and given the work in because they think it is not fair because of others getting more time. So overall, it was a little bit of a I don't know, a bubble full of anxiety and stress.”
High Marking	T14	“I suppose the obvious one is it just adds what the main thing that we're trying to battle with all the time in English it's just adding to mark load and the workload. Markings massive marking is really hard to keep up with.”
High Workload	T4	“There's different types of homework if it's a homework or the physical, you have to hand something in, it adds to the workload for the teacher, if it was revision or pre learning, and they don't do it. Well, it's more just stress.”
Little Impact on Progress	T13	“It means that they're having to go home and spend, you know, an hour or so every night doing homework. That may or may not be particularly useful to them.”
	T1	“Research around homework suggests that when done poorly, if it has almost no effects on or positive effects on attainment.”
Lack of Extra-curricular	T13	“Fresher exercise, mental resilience, communication, friendships, relationship building. I think all of that is far more important as a child, we're meant to play and, you know, just sort of be a child. I think if they're spending all day at school, they deserve time off when they get home, to do other things and engage in other interests and in an ideal world they I feel you know that children should all be outside playing or going to sports activities or playing instruments or doing other things.”

Stress	T15	“That leads to a lot of pressure ... having to get through the content really quickly ... pressure to make sure the kids understand it, but also pressure of getting the marking done and being judged on that marking ... similar to the data drops, being judged on the marks you give ... if I give lower marks than other subjects there’s that judgement, and that can be stressful ... the lead-up is stressful and then the marking itself.”
	T11	“So, it's me then tracking that member stuff. And by penalising that member of stuff then which causes more stress and headache because they haven't done that one piece of homework.”

6.2.2 Positive Effects of Homework

Key quotes from teachers linked to the theme of “Positive Effects of Homework” can be found in Table 16 towards the end of this subsection.

Conversely, teachers did report some positive effects of homework, which form the basis of the next theme. However, discussion of these positive aspects was noticeably more limited, especially when compared with the more dominant and wider-ranging concerns raised earlier in relation to negative effects.

The first sub-theme within Positive Effects was that of being able to provide “Effective Feedback” to students. T1 stated passionately a case for homework and it being vital to providing good feedback. T1 also goes on to link with “Progress”, which was the largest of the sub-themes related to Positive Effects of Homework.

T15 also agrees by adding “I like marking [homework] essays because I like seeing the progress of the students.” The large proportion of teachers speaking about the positive

effects on progress from homework is important, especially as before all the interviews the researcher highlighted the fact that research into attainment and homework has been studied heavily, and little research has been conducted focusing on wellbeing and homework. Despite this prelude, staff still spoke about a positive effect of homework on wellbeing being the progress of students. It appears that progress and attainment might be at least minorly linked to the wellbeing of staff, which is a notable finding.

Another sub-theme that occurred was that of “Enjoyment”, where some students enjoy homework (T13). A few teachers commented how homework can improve lessons and consequently improve on the wellbeing of the students who enjoy their lessons as they are more purposeful (T10).

Another theme is that of “Independent Learning” and giving students ownership, as well as developing their own self drive and initiative (T8).

The final and smallest sub-theme identified is that of “Reduced Workload”. This is contradictory to the earlier identified sub-theme within “Negative Effects of Homework” but might highlight the differences in homework strategies and tasks implemented. T13 spoke passionately about this with a ‘Pre-learning’ strategy which was designed especially with this in mind. The reduction in workload is the lack of marking of homework needed, which consequently has a positive impact on wellbeing. It was identified earlier how significant marking is related to wellbeing, and reducing the marking here has been explicitly linked to improved wellbeing.

Table 16: Teachers quotes on the theme of “Positive Effects of Homework”

Table 16	6.2.2	Teachers: Positive Effects of Homework
Sub-theme	Teacher	Quote
Effective Feedback	T1	“If used effectively homework there in terms of the quality teaching, the quality feedback needed and ensuring students produce work to the standard and depth required homework is a crucial tool for that.”
Progress	T1	“The progress made by the higher achieving students and the actual skills that the group in general develop as they get confidence within the subjects, I think homework is a huge, huge part of that.”
Enjoyment	T13	“I'm not sure that it really gave them some of the more focused ones, the more academic ones would have probably enjoyed doing that. They would have sat at home and quite enjoyed that...”
	T10	“I think any homework like I say we have you know, we've done bits of this in the past where we have kind of integrated homework into schemes of learning. And when yeah, like I say when you see the purpose, much of it when it fits in with what you're doing in the classroom, it kind of complemented I guess that does have a positive effect on your wellbeing in as much as you feel you know, you felt like you're getting through stuff and getting through well. So yeah. Well integrate homework is maybe positives and well to wellbeing.”
Independent Learning	T8	“[I] Prefer the homework with Key Stage four really because you get a lot more reward back from that. Because often kids then are being independent and coming up with things that you haven't orchestrated or necessarily directed them to.”
Reduced Workload	T13	“They like the competition and there's no marking for me ... the no marking has been really good for my wellbeing. For the pupils' wellbeing, having pre-learning tasks is going to be better because they will find that easier to do ... they're not having to sit at a computer; they can listen and then come into the next lesson and see the value of that immediately.”

6.2.3 Favoured Homework Tasks

Key quotes from teachers linked to the theme of “Favoured Homework Tasks” can be found in Table 17 towards the end of this subsection.

The next theme that was explored was that of “Favoured Homework Tasks”. It was important to identify homework tasks that were important to teacher wellbeing and why they had a positive impact on wellbeing. An overwhelming favoured homework task was “Self-Marked Homework”, or where there was a lack of teacher marking. This is understandable following our earlier identification of how much marking had an impact on wellbeing. It is therefore plausible that homework which eliminated this key detrimental factor would be favoured and require further exploration (T3). Software that allowed teachers to set homework easily while reducing workload such as marking was also favoured (T17).

T6 also favoured uploading work to online platforms and gave examples of how this is used and how it benefits the students in Figure 13 (overleaf). T6 goes on to explain that:

“All I do is I take a few questions out of the pupils. Try the questions themselves, and put online, upload a video and the answers so the pupils can go home, watch the video. Correct the homework and take more ownership.”

This extract shows how this teacher uses homework to promote independence rather than extending classwork. By providing videos and model answers online, they aim to shift responsibility onto students so they can “take more ownership”. This highlights a different perspective from students: for this teacher, homework is framed as a tool for autonomy and self-correction, rather than an additional burden. It also illustrates how digital platforms are

used to streamline homework processes and reduce the need for direct teacher input outside lessons.

Figure 13: T6 Homework Piece – Self marked work 1

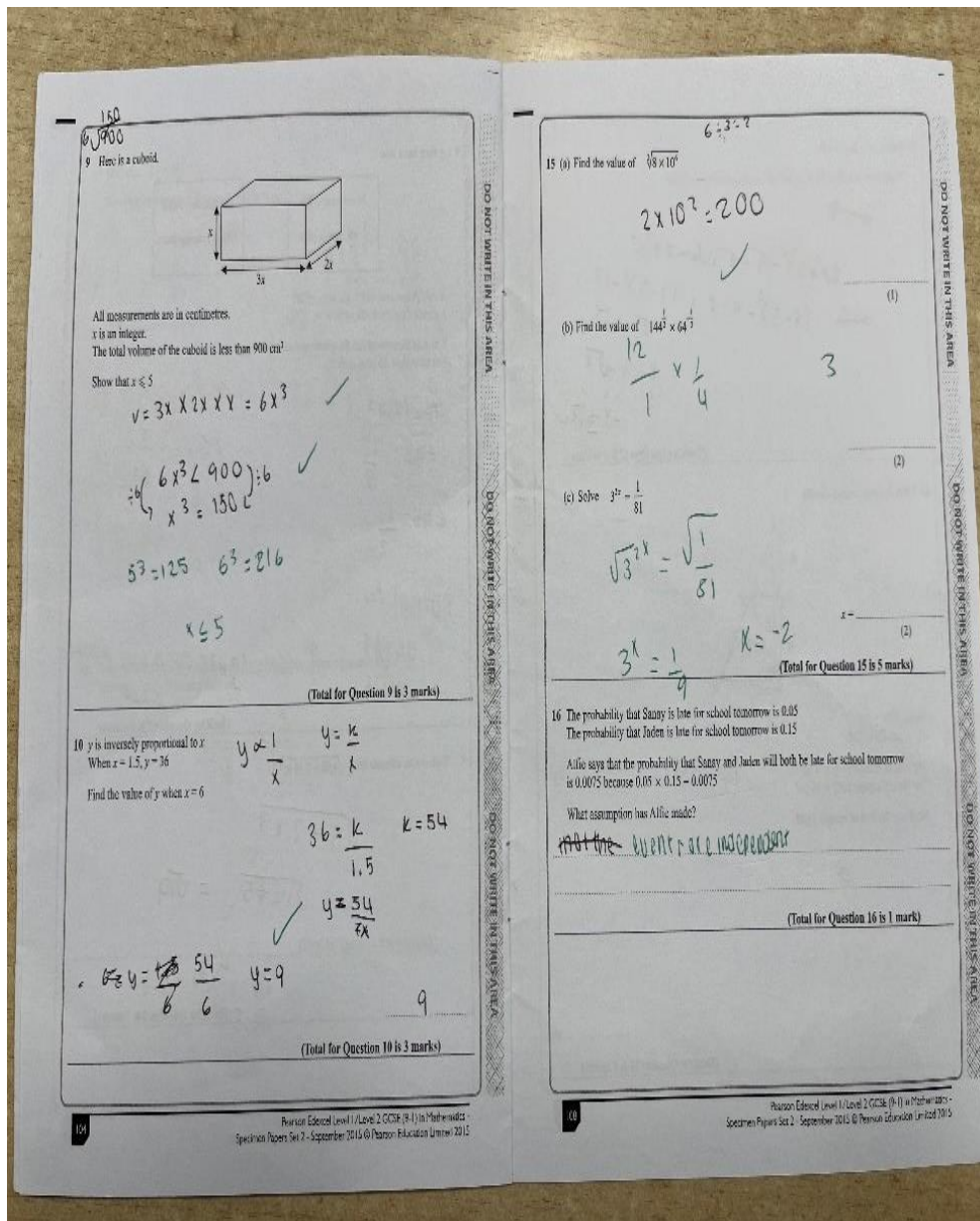


Figure 14: T6 Homework Self marked work 2

5) Find all the possible sizes of angle DBC.

$$\frac{\sin A}{a} = \frac{\sin B}{b}$$

$$\frac{\sin(45)}{9} = \frac{\sin B}{12}$$

$$\sin^{-1}\left(\frac{12\sin(45)}{9}\right) = 70.5^\circ \rightarrow \text{Acute angle}$$

$$180 - 70.5 = 109.5 \rightarrow \text{Obtuse angle}$$

6) Calculate the size of angle D.

$$a^2 = b^2 + c^2 - 2bc \cos A$$

$$541 = 25^2 + 21^2 - 2 \times 25 \times 21 \cos(60)$$

$$\sqrt{541} = 23.3$$

$$\cos A = \frac{b^2 + c^2 - a^2}{2bc}$$

$$\cos^{-1}\left(\frac{16^2 + 18^2 - 23.3^2}{2 \times 16 \times 18}\right) = 86.3^\circ$$

7) Find the bearing of C from A.

$$\cos A = \frac{b^2 + c^2 - a^2}{2bc}$$

$$\cos^{-1}\left(\frac{29^2 + 44^2 - 35^2}{2 \times 44 \times 29}\right) = 52.5^\circ$$

$$\sin^{-1}\left(\frac{29 \sin(52.5)}{35}\right) = 41.1^\circ$$

$$360 - 100 - 41.1 = 218.9^\circ$$

8) Calculate the height of the tree.

$$\tan(42) = \frac{h}{x}$$

$$0.9 = \frac{h}{x}$$

$$x = \frac{h}{0.9}$$

$$\tan(18) = \frac{h}{15+x}$$

$$0.3 = \frac{h}{15+x}$$

$$15+x = 0.3h$$

$$15 + \frac{h}{0.9} = 0.3h$$

$$50 + \frac{h^2}{3} = h^2$$

$$50 = 3h - h$$

$$50 = 2h$$

$$\text{height} = 25\text{m}$$

ABT = 180 - 42 = 138

ATB = 180 - 138 - 18 = 24

$$TB = \frac{15}{\sin 24} = \frac{15 \sin 18}{\sin 24} = 11.4$$

y = 11.4 tan 18

$$\sin 42 \times 2 \times 11.4 = 7.6\text{m}$$

Height of tree = 7.6m

Looking at Figure 14 above, the little amount of input from the teacher is apparent, in terms of marking, (red pen), compared to the students input (green pen).

Other homework types included “Pre-Learning” which had been identified before. For example, T4 stated they would like to set “More pre learning. I think that's the direction the department wants to go which I would be all in favour for.” Pre-learning had been growing in popularity in its implementation around the school, mainly due to the positive effects such as limited marking needed and reduced negative consequences and impact if it has not been completed (T13).

Other preferred types of homework that have been identified in sub-themes include “Experiences and Activities”. One teacher who was interested in homework on attainment prior to the research promoted other countries’ homework approach of focusing on extracurricular activities (T10). This teacher was passionate about giving students extracurricular activities as homework, and once mentioned in a Head of Department meeting the need to give students homework and after school opportunities that are non-academic and the need to be more experiential and interpersonal (T10).

“Reading” outside of lesson was highlighted as a major indicator to success for students (T10).

The final type was “Revision”, and T12 stated “So the type of homework that we set in for Key Stage three is learning vocab.” Interestingly, when probed further T12 also stated this linked to limited marking as they asked the students to mark this. They went on to explain that “There is no really, let's say involvement, from the teacher in terms of marking”.

Outside of these sub-themes, there were some additional noteworthy comments and examples given. One teacher was very much in favour of letting students be creative and setting small projects. An example of this can be seen in Figure 15 overleaf. T4 goes on to explain the piece by saying:

“We learn about volcanoes ... the different shapes ... how they are formed ... it shows off their creative side ... it’s fairly simple to do ... really just paper and a plastic bottle ... they get to show off their creativity ... it shows that they can follow simple, straightforward instructions ... it’s all independent ... we always get good, high-quality work from it.”

This extract shows how this teacher views homework as an opportunity for creativity and independence. By choosing tasks that are “simple to do” and require minimal resources, they aim to make homework accessible while still allowing students to “show off their creative side”. The emphasis on following “simple straightforward instructions” suggests that the teacher sees homework as a way for pupils to demonstrate practical understanding without excessive pressure. Their comment that they “always get good high-quality work” indicates a belief that this approach is effective and motivating for students.

By setting this piece of work, it also limits the marking and time spent marking it. This can be seen with an overlap with T8 who was discussing the time it took to mark extended pieces:

“It still requires us to read and it does take a lot longer than a glance at an image and knowing straight away that you can say that’s a lovely drawing”.

Figure 15: Student Homework Example – Volcano Creative Piece by T4



Another rationale for giving a creative project once a term instead of more regular homework tasks was outlined further by T4, who stated that, “I just feel that [we] have to give the kids a break. I just, I honestly, the bottom my heart I think that they honestly have enough in school. Like, they need to switch off as well.”

Table 17: Teachers quotes on the theme of Favoured Homework Tasks

Table 17	6.2.3	Teachers: Favoured Homework Tasks
Sub-theme	Teacher	Quote
Self-Marked Homework	T3	"Online revision and quizzes ... Seneca ... they have the topic that I want to set ... they do a bit of revision based on that topic and then I assign the quizzes ... all I need to do is go online and check which students have done it and how they've performed ... I can even see when it's been done, so I can set a clear deadline."
	T17	"Being an IT teacher, the best thing is to try and get online platforms that allow to set students work, mark it, check their progress, [and] export the data. So, there's some good things like Seneca for example."
Pre-Learning	T13	"You know that's so I'm rethinking how I set it for next year. And I might do more pre learning where they have to listen to something and then that is our starter the following week. So if they don't do it it's not critical, but hopefully they will see the benefit of doing it and it will have an impact on the next lesson."
Experience and Activities	T10	"I don't know enough about it, but I suspect if we looked at Scandinavian countries... place Finland who, who rank permanently persistently highly in the PISA rankings. They don't believe in homework; they believe in extracurricular activities."
	T10	"Experiential learning ... I can give a kid a text that is a description of a beautiful pastoral scene in the Lake District, but that's not going to plump their cultural-capital gap like taking them to Mill Valley or the Lake District and having them stand on top of a big hill looking down at a beautiful lake and seeing it for themselves."
Reading	T10	"The expectation for your homework is that you read you know for English, there is no there is no, there is no bigger factor in your success, English. Outside of the frequency of the reading, and the breadth of the reading."

6.2.4 Disliked Homework Tasks

Key quotes from teachers linked to the theme of “Disliked Homework Tasks” can be found in Table 18 towards the end of this subsection.

When looking at Disliked Homework Tasks, there was a balance between various tasks with no majorly dominant type. The highest rated sub-theme was that of “Extended Writing”. T8 explains how Extended Writing tasks take extra time and effort to mark from a teacher perspective (T8).

Multiple elements reoccur here such as time and the fact it requires marking. There is an overlap here with another sub-theme of “Worksheets”, where T9 goes on to explain how “The kids really despise worksheets, where they've actually got to write loads”, which presumably will also require time and effort for marking afterwards. A further element to the dislike of worksheet homework is due to admin tasks afterwards (T11).

These appear to align with other themes where there is a negative effect on wellbeing with follow up admin tasks as well as marking. These types of homework naturally lend themselves to these follow up activities once the homework deadline has been met.

Other sub-themes that were very lightly touched upon were “None” (as in there were no disliked homework types) by T1 who stated, “Back to Key Stage five again, now with a bit of experience, I'd say no.”. Interestingly, however, this teacher does not teach Key Stage Three, where responses were different.

Despite a high proportion of teachers favouring online and self-marking homework tasks earlier, some disliked “Online Quizzes” due to students not completing it properly and rushing multiple choice questions (T11).

The final sub-theme here was that of Research Tasks. T16 noted that “research tasks are quite difficult to get them to complete... in a timely manner.” However, there were no dominant views across the teacher interviews about Disliked Homework Tasks more broadly. Instead, the comments offered by teachers tended to focus on the consequences or workload that followed certain tasks, as highlighted in earlier themes. While teachers expressed a preference for tasks such as self-marking activities, they did not report clear or consistent negative feelings toward other specific types of homework.

Table 18: Teachers quotes on the theme of “Disliked Homework Tasks”

Table 18	6.2.4	Teachers: Disliked Homework Tasks
Sub-theme	Teacher	Quote
Extended Writing	T8	“Probably written tasks because they’re longer to mark ... there’s a lot of emphasis on marking for literacy, so we have to mark spellings and grammar ... any kind of descriptive task — describe, reflect on what you’ve done, say how you can improve it — still requires us to read, and it takes a lot longer.”
Worksheets	T11	“Previous years we've always had paper copies we give out to the students during a practical lesson or at the end of practical lesson, no big issues. Then when it comes to handling date; 'I've lost my sheets. I've lost this, can't do this. I couldn't bring this in.”
Online quizzes	T11	“Some of those students aren't doing that. They're not looking at previous research. And what they're doing is they're having a quick glimpse over it. Multiple choice answering the questions, they can go back and do it X amount of times.”

6.2.5 Time

Key quotes from teachers linked to the theme of “Time” can be found in Table 19 towards the end of this subsection.

Another theme that was raised following the interviews was that of Time. This is similar to the pilot study conducted prior to the research, where Time was a main factor. Time is therefore consistently related to wellbeing and homework. One large and significant sub-theme within Time was that of “Lots of Time Spent Marking”, where 13 out of 17 teachers had this complaint. Marking homework can take some teachers hours to complete (T1). T1 also went on to say that “it is time consuming and it is taxing”. This is backed up by T14, who goes on to say that the majority of teachers would have this same complaint. T14 said “everybody would say would affect their wellbeing added to more time spent marking more stuff”. T5 went further to break down how much time is spent marking for one class.

With average class sizes increasing within the researcher’s school, as well as nationally, this negative impact on wellbeing is likely to increase and is therefore still important to address this.

The concerns over Time and homework were also projected onto students as well, as another sub-theme which arose was that of “Lots of Time Completing Homework”. Students are spending too much time on homework tasks due to how many subjects that given them homework (T13).

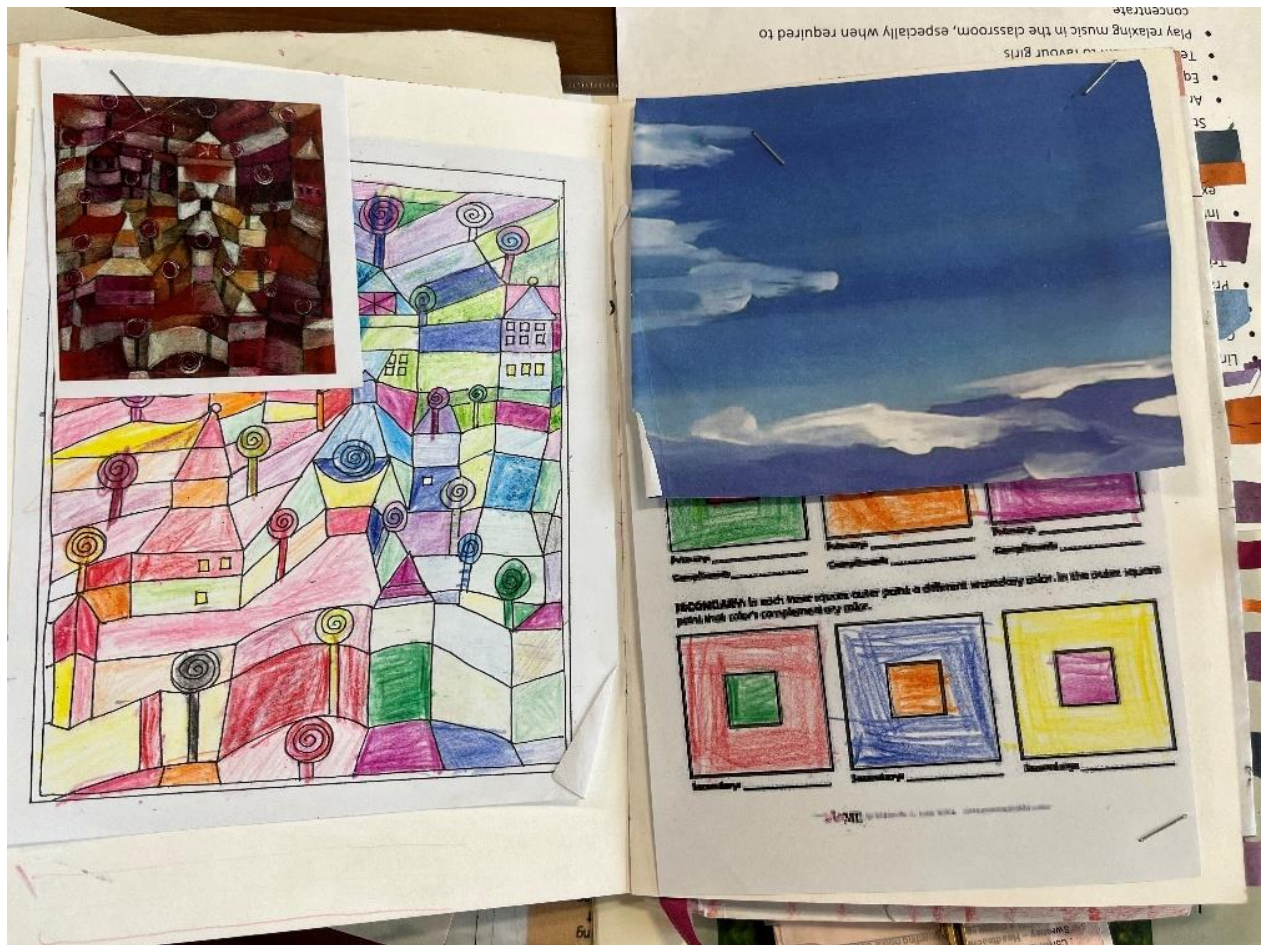
T7 also empathised with students in terms of how many commitments they have, as well as the age that the students are. Some teachers believe that this is a large burden for younger children to cope with (T7).

There seems to be an understanding that children might not have time to complete homework and this will have consequences on teacher wellbeing due to the follow up administration they have to complete when students do not complete the work. However, some of this follow up admin is still taxing when students complete the homework also. T8 provided an example of how time-consuming this process can be for some teachers, particularly when they are required to collate homework and add it to students' books as evidence. This can be seen in Figure 16 below, and is T8 explains by saying:

“Yeah, it does because ... a lot of my time is spent ... sticking things and stapling things into books that have been done at home.”

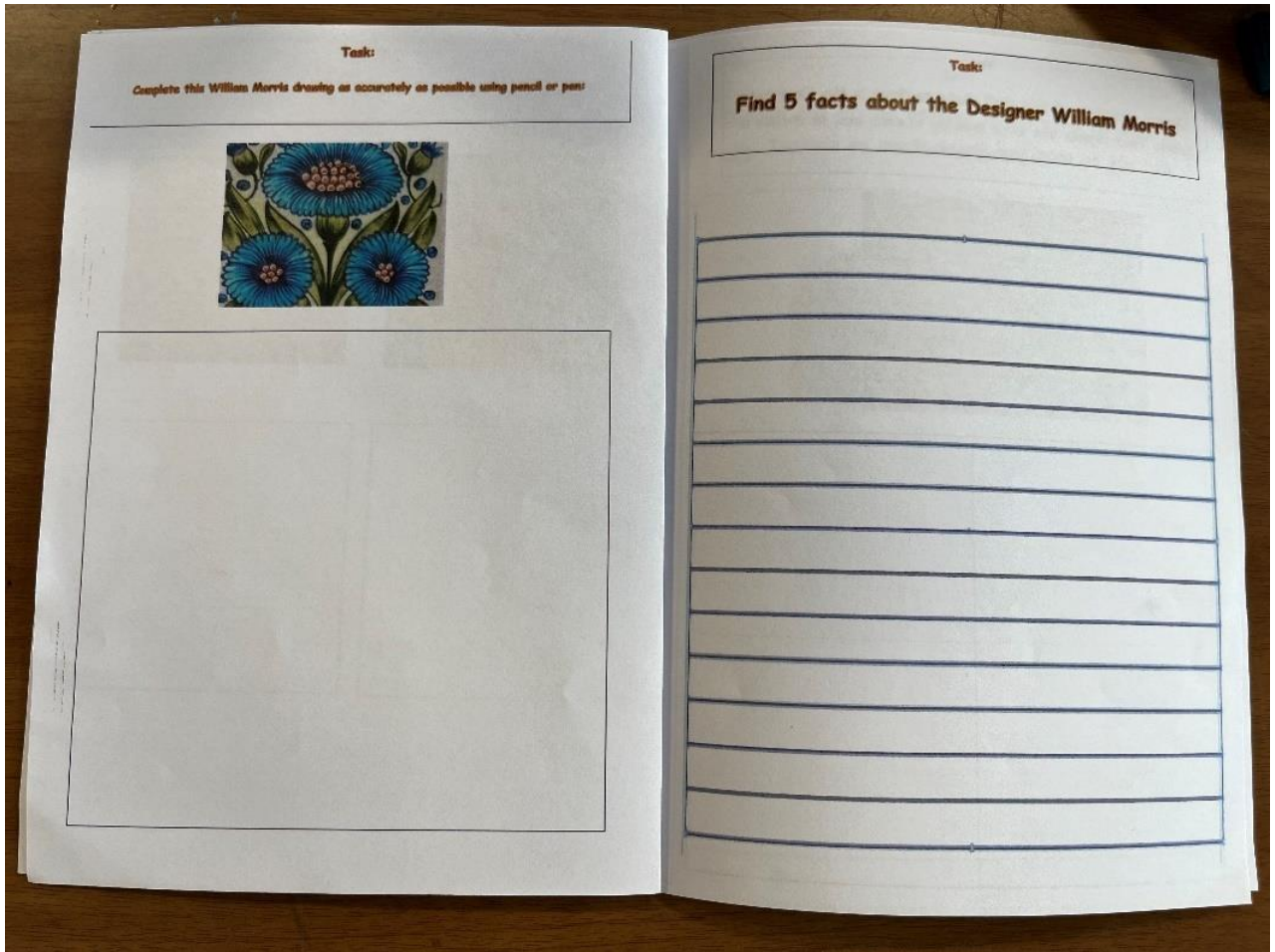
This extract highlights how homework can create additional workload for teachers as well as students. The teacher explains that a significant amount of their time is spent “sticking things and stapling things into books” that pupils have completed at home. This suggests that homework generates administrative tasks that extend beyond planning and marking, and that the process of managing physical workbooks can be time-consuming. It also shows that teachers experience the impact of homework systems in practical, everyday ways that are often overlooked.

Figure 16: T8 example of homework stuck and stapled into exercise book



T8 goes on to explain how this has been adapted to a booklet now, which can be seen in Figure 17 overleaf.

Figure 17: T8 Adaptation of homework booklet



Another sub-theme identified related to Time, with there being “No Time in Lessons”.

Students will often be given homework as a way of completing the course due to restrictions in teaching hours (T17).

As is evident, Time is an important factor relating to homework and teacher wellbeing, but it is a complicated element which has different angles affecting wellbeing. Regardless, it is still an influential factor that needs to be focused upon.

Table 19: Teacher quotes on the theme of Time

Table 19	6.2.5	Teachers: Time
Sub-theme	Teacher	Quote
Lots of time spent marking	T1	"I think that is something where wellbeing is impacted because of the actual amount of man hours that they're putting into marking coursework portfolios which sit across the classwork and the homework tasks."
	T5	"A class of roughly 25 students ... it'll probably take an hour to mark it, probably under an hour for the admin — putting it on Firefly, writing it down — and then another hour to give feedback. In effect, you're looking at three to four hours just for that one type of homework we might give to the students."
Lots of Time Completing Homework	T13	"There's too many subjects if you've got every subject being done and they've got to do homework for every subject. Every week. That's too much time that pupils are spending on homework."
	T7	"There's a big burden for students in terms of wellbeing ... the majority of the kids finish school at 3:30, go home, and between 4:00 and 4:30 they need to attend mosque ... they're there for an hour, maybe two hours ... then they come back, need to do homework, and then go to bed. There's a lot for a child to juggle at a young age."
No Time in Lessons	T17	"I don't particularly want to spend my time dealing with homework, but I find that to get through the course and to manage the workload and the specification and making sure the students understand everything in terms of the exam; I have to give certain things as homework, I can't cover everything in the lessons."

6.2.6 Gained Time Usage

Key quotes from teachers linked to the theme of "Gained Time Usage" can be found in Table 20 towards the end of this sub-chapter.

Due to Time being a key and important element, it was asked about what teachers would do with their free time if they did not have to spend so much time marking or setting homework. This was called Gained Time and when asked what teachers would do with this, there were some multiple sub-themes which emerged. The most occurring sub-theme which 15 out of 19 teachers discussed was using their gained time to “Improving Lessons”. Some teachers went into detail with how they would improve their lessons by creating resources (T11), by focusing on key skills (T5), or by making them more engaging (T13).

Another sub-theme that emerged that was specifically and directly linked to wellbeing was that of “Personal Time”. Some teachers spoke about how they would use time outside of lessons to relax if they did not have homework to mark (T3). Many teachers seem to work beyond the end of the school day, and if they gained time, they could use this time to also focus on their own Personal Time and wellbeing. Some teachers said they would still be working during that time, but it would be on more important school admin tasks (T7).

T4 also agrees with this sentiment, by stating that “It allows me, for my own wellbeing at the end of the day, is need to have not do actual work at home.” It seems clear from this that reducing the time spent on homework has a direct link and likely improvement on wellbeing.

Table 20: Teachers quotes on the theme of “Gained Time Usage”

Table 20	6.2.6	Teachers: Gained Time Usage
Sub-theme	Teacher	Quote
Improving Lessons	T11	“If I didn't have to mark the homework or anything of that sort, I would use the time to make resources, enabling those students, to empower them with more life skills, hands on skills”.
	T5	“I'll probably spend more time thinking about how to develop literacy skills in the classroom if I wasn't spending that time marking.”
	T13	“I think I'd spend more time planning the lessons. So would free up time to actually make lessons better? I'd focus on things like their start, you know starter activities and plenaries and making sure that they really engaging at the beginning and it would free up time.”
Personal time	T3	“If homework is the reason I’m mentally exhausted, then I can use that time to not be mentally exhausted and to do something that actually helps me feel better ... that will help me have better days in school or think of another creative way of delivering my lesson. Once you remove one aspect of stress, you can think of something better to do in your practice.”
	T7	“There’s no teacher that stops working at 3:30 ... we still continue to work, and there has to be a compromise in what I’m delivering in lessons because I’m dealing with all the other admin stuff as well ... it’s not that I’m not working — I’m still working, but I’m not working on what’s important. If homework wasn’t there, a big chunk of my life in work would improve.”

6.2.7 Policies

Key quotes from teachers linked to the theme of “Policies” can be found in Table 21 towards the end of this sub-chapter.

Policy was another key theme that emerged in the pilot study and resurfaced during the teacher interviews. One notable sub-theme within this area was “Conforming to Policy”.

Some teachers described having to create timetables for staff to set homework on specific days or during particular lessons (T1), illustrating how policy expectations shaped their practice.

T1 then also questions this themselves by asking “are we just doing it for the sake of doing it?” There were a few teachers that felt this way and they were setting homework to conform to a school policy that they disagreed with. Some teachers even feel the policy is pointless and they risked repercussions by completely ignoring this policy (T13). There does seem to be an undercurrent of not having ownership of when and how to set homework, which had a negative consequence on wellbeing (T10). T10 agreed with the above by saying that younger teachers in particular can feel pressured by senior staff expectations, noting that “I could see younger teachers feeling the pressure of expectation from senior members of staff.” However, there were still teachers who stuck with the policy despite it having such a negative effect on wellbeing (T15).

A further sub-theme within Policies concerned whether teachers wished to keep, change, or remove the existing homework policy. Some teachers expressed a desire for greater autonomy, wanting the freedom to decide how and when homework should be set in ways that aligned with their subject needs (T1). Others questioned the usefulness of the homework timetable and felt it restricted their professional judgement (T3). T6 went further, suggesting that “homework should be optional,” reflecting a broader sense that policy expectations were having a detrimental impact on teacher wellbeing.

Another related sub-theme involved the idea of adopting a ‘No Homework’ policy. Although this view was less common, a small number of teachers raised it as a possibility, often linking

it to improved wellbeing or reduced pressure for both staff and students. T12, for example, stated, “If I had to make a decision, I will get rid of homework,” while T17 made a direct connection between removing homework and enhanced wellbeing.

In contrast, only one teacher expressed a preference for keeping the current approach to homework unchanged (T6). This highlights the diversity of views within the staff body, while also illustrating that most teachers were seeking some form of change - whether increased autonomy or a reduction in admin that they had to do.

Table 21: Teachers quotes on the theme of Policies

Table 21	6.2.7	Teachers: Policies
Sub-theme	Teacher	Quote
Conforming to Policy	T1	“So as a head of Year, I know the homework timetable for my year group is one piece of homework per core subjects a week, and then one piece of homework, non core subjects, every fortnight. A lot of times what I would say is it's kind of an afterthought.”
	T13	“I’m aware of it and I look at it, but I ignore it ... I’m going to see them over this half-term six times, so I’ll set two homeworks in that time ... I set it during a week where I feel it’s appropriate rather than every week ... I won’t set it according to the timetable; I set it where I feel it’s most necessary. So I ignore the timetable.”
	T10	“I don't want to be told I won't be told when to set homework, how to set homework. I want the autonomy.”
	T15	“So, if it's set as a ticks tick box, I have to set it and mark it. Then I find it for my wellbeing. It's just very stressful because it's just ticking boxes doing it for the sake of doing it.”
Change	T1	“I don't think there's one policy that fits all. And I think that's where that autonomy and that flexibility and knowing your courses are knowing the needs of your students.”
	T3	“I think I would like it that we only set homework when it was necessary, rather than we had to set it once or twice or

		three times per half term. I think that's too rigid. And it doesn't always suit the subject.”
No Homework	T17	“thinking about it now is really good for my wellbeing that there is no homework because then I don't have to. It's one thing I just don't have to deal with in a heavy workload.”
Keep	T6	“I can't really see myself having been in a school where there's no homework policy because it wouldn't work for us as a department.”

6.2.8 Performance Management

Performance Management emerged as another theme linked to negative effects on teacher wellbeing, particularly in relation to homework. In many schools, performance management involves activities such as work scrutinies, lesson observations, and departmental reviews, and multiple teachers described how these processes shaped their approach to homework. Some felt compelled to set or mark homework mainly or even exclusively to satisfy performance management expectations rather than because it supported learning, which contributed to additional pressure and reduced wellbeing. T15 stated, “So they were little homeworks that felt like I had to mark for sake of marking it. And it was just doing it for admin sake.” Staff might do these for the sake of fear of these appraisals. Although there have been changes to the current school system, the worry about these appraisals from a previous legacy still occurs. Although the school’s current approach to performance management has softened, teachers still carried anxieties shaped by a previous, more punitive system. Some described earlier experiences in which observations and appraisals felt high-stakes and potentially career-damaging, and these concerns continued to influence how they approached homework, as explained by T10:

“We hold each other to account internally ... not as a way of devolving any kind of accountability but so it's not threatening ... so it doesn't destroy careers unnecessarily.”

This extract shows how teachers also experience accountability pressures linked to homework and wider school processes. The teacher emphasises that internal accountability is designed to be “not threatening”, suggesting an awareness of how formal monitoring can feel punitive. Their reference to avoiding actions that “destroy careers unnecessarily” highlights the emotional weight attached to performance expectations. This indicates that staff, like students, navigate systems that can feel high-stakes, and that efforts are made within departments to manage this in a supportive rather than punitive way.

The statement by T10 was quite vocal with and explained why some teachers may set homework to conform with policy. ‘When revisiting T15’s interview, it also shed light on another statement, “So I think with the stress levels, it's sometimes if we have to do data drop, we need proof for what kind of grades have on and it's all about proof and data”.

Clearly there was a negative influence on teacher wellbeing. If teachers were setting homework they did not believe in and had to action and did so out of fear of the negative consequences, this would have a detrimental impact on teacher wellbeing.

6.2.9 Teachers Feeling a Lack of Trust

The previous theme tied in heavily with the current theme of Teachers Feeling a Lack of Trust. T1 states that, “I think staff sometimes need to be able to be trusted to use their judgement more in terms of timing and the nature of homework they set.” T12 went further and implied that teachers were overly monitored to make sure that they were setting

homework. T12 went further to say, “We shouldn't be criticised, we shouldn't be monitored, if we set in homework.” T14 also added to this by stating that, “I Just feel like I'm just having to jump through a hoop and that in mind, but that can make people really disengaged quite quickly.”

This theme tied in heavily with conforming to Policies and also made teachers feel like they lacked autonomy over what and how they set homework in the classroom.

6.2.10 Pointless

As the analysis moved into the smaller themes, the overlap and interconnections between them became increasingly evident. The perception that some homework was ‘Pointless’ surfaced repeatedly and intersected with other themes across the dataset. One way this can be summarised is by T4 who stated that, “It's still adding to your workload, or it's done badly where it's pointless. And then you are just it's a waste of everybody's time. You can tell when it's good or bad.” This also pointed towards a detrimental impact on wellbeing when a ‘Pointless’ homework assignment was being distributed to students where teachers did not wish to set it. T7 illustrated this by explaining a typical interaction with their students in a monologue and their own self-reflection:

T7: “Have you set the homework yet?”

[Student:] “No.”

T7 (with clear sarcasm): “Lovely.”

T7 (reflecting): “How much have I actually gained from that? Not very much. How much has it added to the burden on me? Massively.”

T8 also added to this by saying, “it's kind of just set in the simplest, superficial list kind of way to tick a box.” The phrases “tick box” and “hoop jumping” appeared across interviews and were often used when teachers discussed homework tasks they felt lacked genuine purpose.

6.2.11 Homework Not Checked

The final theme that also overlapped and tied with earlier themes was a lack of checking of homework. Due to high workload and other issues, teachers seemed to set work and not check it. This might also be an avoidance strategy to the “Follow Up Admin” subtheme identified earlier. T14 illustrated this by saying, “Do I in my department? I just say we set it once a week. But I don't - I hold my hands up. I don't check or check or monitor that.” This was also found here by T1, who said, “we can just set homework as a knowledge check and then it's never checked”.

6.2.12 Word Cloud and Teacher Conclusion

The final part of analysing the results with NVivo is to look at Word Cloud and incorporate this with the themes identified to make a sound overall insight into the effects of homework on teacher wellbeing. Word Cloud in Figure 11 (earlier in the chapter) was created using NVivo and setting a minimal word length to 6 letters and included up to a ‘Specialisation’ level of wording, similar to the student word cloud.

When considering the teacher word cloud presented earlier in the chapter, connections emerge between homework practices and teacher wellbeing. The ethnography suggest that the volume of work teachers are required to complete, combined with the additional demands of homework, contributes to feelings of pressure and reduced professional autonomy. Many teachers described wanting greater freedom to decide how homework is set and emphasised the importance of being trusted to exercise their professional judgement. These views were often linked to concerns about marking load, particularly when homework was tied to a fixed timetable.

Across the themes discussed above, teachers highlighted the importance of homework being purposeful rather than routine or tokenistic. They emphasised that tasks should be planned in ways that support learning, align with curriculum needs, and avoid unnecessary workload. Approaches that allow teachers to decide when, how, and whether homework is set were viewed as more supportive of wellbeing. Teachers also pointed to the value of using tasks or digital tools that require minimal marking or enable self-assessment, noting that these approaches can reduce workload and free time for planning and other activities they consider more impactful for students.

Research Question 2 - What types of homework do teachers perceive as having a positive or negative impact on student wellbeing?

The findings presented in this section highlight that teachers' concerns are shaped less by the specific type of homework and more by the conditions under which homework is set, monitored and marked. As shown in the teacher word cloud earlier (Figure 11), many of the terms used reflect pressures linked to workload, marking expectations and reduced

professional autonomy. Teachers consistently emphasised that homework is experienced more positively when it is purposeful, aligned with curriculum intent and designed in ways that avoid unnecessary or repetitive marking. Alternatively, tasks that are routine, seen as tokenistic or “tick box” or tied to rigid homework timetables were viewed as detrimental to both teacher and student wellbeing. Importantly, the data suggest that no single form of homework is universally perceived by teachers as inherently supportive or harmful. This insight aligns closely with the 4p Model developed later in this thesis, which focus on how homework is created and set as opposed to the tasks themselves.

The teacher findings showed that homework was closely tied to wider pressures within school life, including workload, accountability, and the expectations placed on staff to maintain academic standards. Teachers described the tension between wanting to support students’ wellbeing and feeling obliged to set tasks that aligned with school policies or curriculum demands. Many also recognised that certain types of homework created unnecessary stress for students, yet felt limited in their ability to change established practices or policies. These insights offered an important contrast to the student accounts and highlighted the shared challenges both groups faced. Together, the findings provided a fuller picture of how homework impacted wellbeing in the school.

7 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter brings together the findings from students and teachers and considers what they mean for understanding the relationship between homework and wellbeing. It examines how the themes from both groups connect, overlap, or differ, and discusses these patterns in relation to the existing literature and the theoretical ideas outlined earlier in the thesis. The chapter also explores what the findings suggest for everyday school practice, including how homework is set, how it is experienced, and how it might be adapted to better support wellbeing. By drawing these strands together, the chapter provides a clearer interpretation of the results and highlights the implications that follow for policy, teaching, and future research.

The purpose of this discussion section is to review the findings from the student and staff transcripts and to reflect on earlier theoretical models of homework. The discussion will focus on how to create a model of homework with the student and staff concerns of homework at the centre, so that a wellbeing focused homework model is created. In the earlier Theoretical Perspectives and Frameworks chapter (Chapter 4), some models were identified as influential in homework practices, including motivation, task value and attainment. The present discussion returns to these models by examining how the current thesis results relates to these models. This section also reflects on the Expectancy–Value Theory and the SMART Homework model. In addition, insights from the pilot study are drawn upon where relevant, as the pilot provided early indications of student stress,

perceptions of task value, and concerns about workload that were later confirmed and expanded in the full dataset.

7.1 LINK BACK TO THE PILOT STUDY MODEL

The pilot study played an important role in directing the four areas identified in the literature review, but its limitations and lack of generalisability to the wider school became increasingly clear once the thesis research was completed. The pilot was conducted with only five Sixth Form students and one teacher, and although it provided valuable initial insights, it did not capture the range of views that emerged when students from all year groups and teachers from a range of subjects and levels of responsibility were included in the thesis research.

As a result, the early model developed during the pilot, which drew on Bloom's Taxonomy and focused primarily on pre-lesson homework (such as pre-learning, as identified by students) as a preparation tool, proved too narrow to account for the wide variation in how different students and staff experienced homework and its impact on wellbeing. This expanded research demonstrated that students' perceptions of homework were far more varied than the pilot suggested, and that wellbeing was influenced by a broader set of factors than whether homework was completed before or after a lesson. Similarly, the views of teachers in the main study showed considerable variation in how homework was set, monitored, and understood, which could not be captured through the single teacher interview conducted in the pilot. These differences highlighted the need for a more comprehensive model, and this is why the earlier Bloom's based model of pre-lesson based homework was not carried forward. This coupled with the fact that the research questions

did not find a specific type of homework that was positive or negative for student or teacher wellbeing showed that the model needed to be rethought. Instead, a new model will be proposed that is more basic in design and will focus on how and why homework is set, as opposed to the specific type of homework tasks that are set.

7.2 LINKING BACK TO THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The findings of this thesis reinforce the concerns raised in the literature review about the importance of purpose of homework in shaping students' experiences of homework. Earlier research highlighted that students complete homework not because they see value in it, but because they fear sanctions such as detentions or parental involvement (Gelen, 2020). This thesis echoed this pattern, with students frequently describing homework as 'pointless' or lacking clear rationale, and reporting that this undermined their motivation and contributed to negative feelings towards homework. This confirms the argument that when the purpose of homework is unclear or poorly communicated, the emotional cost to students can overshadow any intended academic benefit.

The findings also support the concerns raised in the literature review about the role of time in shaping both student and teacher experiences of homework. Earlier research highlighted that teachers were working increasingly long hours, with some reporting workloads exceeding fifty hours per week and identifying this as a major source of stress (Teacher Wellbeing Index, 2019). This thesis reflected this pattern, with teachers describing how the time required to set, monitor, and follow up on homework added to an already demanding workload. This aligns with arguments that marking and administrative expectations can

become a significant burden and contribute directly to reduced teacher wellbeing (Armstrong and Tsokova, 2019).

For students, the literature review highlighted the significant amount of time spent completing homework, with some studies reporting averages of more than three hours per night (Galloway, Conner and Pope, 2013). The students from the thesis research found similar concerns. Students described feeling overcommitted, juggling multiple deadlines (subjects and teachers), and struggling to find time for rest, leisure, extracurricular activities and in some cases, religious activities. This thesis displayed how these pressures vary across year groups and by demonstrating that the impact of time pressure is often significant.

The next category from the literature review was that of stress levels. Earlier research highlighted the pressure placed on students in high-stakes subjects such as mathematics, where national and international comparisons have contributed to a culture of performance anxiety and heightened expectations (Brown *et al.*, 2003). Students in this thesis also stated similar pressures, with students frequently describing maths homework and apps as a significant source of stress and pressure. This aligns with international findings showing that high-performing systems, such as Singapore, often report elevated levels of test anxiety despite high academic outcomes (Lowe and Ang, 2012). However, equally notable was that some students conversely enjoyed and appreciated this type of homework, further showing how there is variation between students in terms of what types of homework they find stressful and not.

The final category of focus for the literature review was that of policy. The literature review highlighted the absence of consistent homework policies within and between schools, with

teachers and parents unaware of whether a policy even existed (Holland *et al.*, 2021).

Students in the thesis research described experiencing variation in the amount or type of homework depending on the teacher or subject. Teachers stated the reasons for setting homework also varied, with some saying they set it for school policy, some openly defiant of the school policy and some setting it as routine. This inconsistency contributed to stress for both groups, as some students struggled to manage unpredictable workloads and some teachers felt pressured to set homework without clear guidance or rationale. These findings support the argument that vague or absent policies can lead to significant disparities in practice and undermine both learning and wellbeing.

When reflecting back on these four categories from the literature review, the analysis highlights why the earlier homework model developed during the pilot study, which drew on Bloom's Taxonomy and focused primarily on pre-lesson preparation, now requires updating.

. The thesis revealed substantial variation in how students and teachers across different year groups, subjects, and roles experienced homework, and this complexity could not be captured by a model that assumed a single structural distinction between pre and post lesson tasks. These findings demonstrate that the original model, while useful as an early starting point, would not be appropriate to apply to a whole school of varied students and teachers.

7.3 LINKING BACK TO PREVIOUS THEORETICAL MODELS

The findings of the main study demonstrated that there are no specific types of homework that consistently produce positive or negative effects on student or teacher wellbeing.

Instead, the data showed that the impact of homework is impacted far more by how and

why homework is set. These results link back to the theoretical perspectives outlined earlier in the thesis (Theoretical Perspectives and Frameworks - chapter 4).

The findings linked with Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988), especially the emphasis on the balance between intrinsic and extraneous loads. Students described feeling overwhelmed when homework was too cognitively demanding without adequate scaffolding or when tasks were set without consideration of competing deadlines from other subjects. This suggests that excessive extraneous load, rather than the type of homework, was responsible for negative wellbeing. In contrast, tasks that were clearly structured and appropriately challenging were experienced more positively, reinforcing the importance of thoughtful task design.

When relating back to the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotskiĭ, 1978), this theory is also reflected in the findings. Students reported that homework was most beneficial when it aligned with what they could reasonably achieve independently, with opportunities to seek support in lessons for more complex concepts. This mirrors the idea that learning is most effective when tasks fall within the learner's ZPD and when guidance is available at the right moment. Homework that exceeded this zone, particularly when students lacked access to adult support at home, contributed to frustration or stress. Although this is linked to pre-lesson homework, not all students needed or wanted this support in lesson or liked this type of homework.

When reviewing the results, there are some clear links with other highlighted theoretical models in the earlier sections of this thesis. Firstly, there are clear similarities between the

main research results and the Expectancy-Value model put forward by Trautwein *et al.* (2006a). A core part of their model is that of “Homework Expectancy” and “Homework Value”, and these are key predictors in terms of whether students complete their homework assignments. When exploring “Homework Expectancy”, there are similarities with the main research in terms of students not being happy with receiving homework with short deadlines and being expected to complete homework, in some circumstances, for the next day. Additionally, it links to whether students feel they have the capability of meeting that deadline. However, the limitation with this earlier model still stands, as the model is primarily focused on whether students will complete homework and how much time they will allocate to it. Wellbeing is not considered; however, the main research would consolidate that “Expectancy” is important, and has had an impact on wellbeing additionally to the likelihood of homework completion. This aligns with wider research showing that perceived control and academic expectations can influence stress and emotional outcomes for young people (Putwain, 2007). The same can also be applied to the same models “Homework Value” element, where students do not value the assignment that they have been given. An additional link here can be made when students in the present research have commented about homework being ‘pointless’ or ‘useless’. Similar to “Expectancy”, the value has an additional impact on student wellbeing as well as homework completion rates, which is consistent with findings that low task value is associated with disengagement and negative affect (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002). These elements are interlinked and crossover and reinforce the need to improve the types of homework or how they are distributed as there are various negative outcomes if they are not handed out in a purposefully thought-out way. If this is not completed correctly, homework completion rate

will be low and the wellbeing of students will also be negatively affected, echoing concerns raised earlier in the literature review of homework burden and student stress (Galloway, Conner and Pope, 2013) . When students do not feel they can fulfil either of these, they have been cited to gain negative feelings, such as stress. This highlights the vital importance of making sure homework is considered more deeply prior to handing out to students.

These findings also build on the insights gained during the pilot study, where students first expressed concerns about unrealistic deadlines, limited perceived value, and the emotional strain associated with homework. The pilot highlighted early patterns of stress and disengagement that were later confirmed in the full dataset, reinforcing the importance of examining homework practices through a wellbeing lens rather than focusing solely on completion and achievement. This pattern is consistent with the concerns raised in the literature review, where studies highlighted the links between perceived control and choice (Glasser, 1999), task value, and student stress in relation to homework demands.

Zhang, Xiao and Fu (2023, p. 9) commented on SMART homework, with a focus on “Learning Engagement”, “Anxiety” and Self-Efficacy”, with the prime focus being on student outcome and how engaged they were with the homework. Notably, some students commented on how they liked online homework and apps used by some subjects, such as Maths, for example. This seemed to be stated when there were explicit links to the exams or had a clear purpose that the students understood and could explain themselves. This reflects wider findings that digital/online homework tools can increase engagement when tasks are clearly aligned with learning goals and perceived as meaningful by students (Rosário *et al.*,

2015). . However, the theory needs to move forward by putting student anxiety levels as an equal priority to that of student completion rates and engagement. Research has increasingly highlighted that homework related anxiety can lower both wellbeing and academic performance, suggesting the need for models that balance cognitive and emotional demands (Pascoe, Hetrick and Parker, 2020) . Therefore, a new model is suggested to focus on and improve student and staff wellbeing and an additional advantage to this model might include an improvement in student engagement and value of homework.

The findings of this study resonate with the theoretical perspectives outlined earlier in the thesis. Dewey's view of learning as an experiential and growth-oriented process helps explain why students valued homework that felt purposeful and connected to their lives, while Dweck's work on mindset illuminates the motivational patterns evident when tasks were either well-scaffolded or overwhelming. Bowlby's attachment principles provide insight into the emotional responses students described, particularly the importance of predictability and relational safety in shaping how homework is experienced. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development further clarifies why students engaged more positively with tasks that aligned with what they had been taught and that offered achievable challenge. The broader psychological theories help contextualise the diverse ways in which homework can support or hinder learning depending on how it is designed and delivered. Glasser's emphasis on autonomy aligns closely with students' desire for clarity, flexibility and control, while Ball's analysis of performativity helps situate teachers' and students' experiences within the wider pressures of accountability and policy. Together, these theoretical

perspectives provide a coherent lens through which to interpret the complex interplay between homework, learning and wellbeing revealed in this study.

7.4 Ethnography reflection

When reflecting upon conducted ethnographies, a common criticism is that of researcher bias and over involvement. This can sometimes be known as “Going Native” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019, p. 91) , where the researcher forgets that they are a researcher and instead takes on the role in an ethnography as their primary role. Going native can affect links made between concepts and themes and the overall conclusions that ethnographers can make. However, this can also be a strength, as Fetterman (2019) , also makes the point that full immersion is necessary part of ethnographic work. He went on to argue that deep engagement with the field can strengthen the quality of the analysis, as it enables the researcher to develop a more detailed understanding of participants’ experiences within their contexts. Willis (2000) argues that reflexivity is important so that the researcher’s history, experience, and theoretical positioning are important and indeed a vital resource for ethnographical research projects. The research was undertaken from an insider position within the school, a standpoint that shaped engagement with participants and required ongoing reflexivity to limit any bias or implications on results. Although some would argue that this hinders the project, it is argued the opposite is true and that the researcher’s experience and understanding of secondary education allows meaningful links to be made, and as such, relevant overall conclusions, and models to be created. Furthermore, ethnography can also be a powerful tool to “help bring about social and structural change”

(Willis, 2000, p. 114), which is ultimately what is sought following the results of this ethnography.

Reflective frameworks were explored to try and objectively and accurately reflect upon the research openly and honestly and not compromise the validity of the findings. When reviewing frameworks, the Four Lenses model was selected (Brookfield, Rudolph and Tan, 2024). Unlike other frameworks, this model had student and teachers as key lenses, and this was important when reflecting upon an ethnography within an educational setting. This reflective framework was a highly suitable fit due to the participants used in main study also having a reflective lens specifically allocated to them. Furthermore, it allows for critical reflection of assumptions and norms in education, such as the common assumption that homework is beneficial and can only have a positive impact. By looking through the lenses of the researcher, students, colleagues (teachers in this case) and theory, a well-rounded understanding of the impact of homework from multiple perspectives was gained, and these insights were crucial to making the concluding model of homework.

When reflecting on the interviews and focus groups themselves, particularly on younger students, not as much information on students' thoughts on homework and wellbeing was extracted as was at first hoped. This could be due to multiple factors. Firstly, the younger students might not have fully understood the concept, or even know themselves what has a positive or negative impact on their own wellbeing. This could be because the students who are in the lower years such as year 7 and 8 are new to the school and they have not had enough time in the current school to assess different homework types and how it impacts

their wellbeing. It could also be that the younger students need to be educated on wellbeing and what it means. Arguably if this is the case, this is an interesting result within itself and should demonstrate the need for research to focus on younger children's views on wellbeing, and perhaps why wellbeing is not explicitly taught in the curriculum at younger ages or perhaps even primary school. Although it is typical for primary schools and early RSHE lessons in secondary schools to talk about physical wellbeing (such as healthy diet, exercise etc), perhaps there is a greater need to explore teaching students at a younger age about psychological wellbeing and what this could be for children at their age.

Secondly, the younger students are perhaps too new to the school to know whether they could be open and honest in the research due to a fear of a consequence of potential criticism towards the school or their teachers. Although students are used to focus groups as part of the performance management process in the school, this mainly focuses on lessons and teaching. However, within this process there remains a sense of loyalty towards their teacher where they want to say the 'right thing' and avoid their teachers 'getting into trouble' (or themselves). This behaviour might have also linked into the focus groups and interviews with students, where they may be unhappy with a homework assignment, subject or teacher, but are reluctant to open with their true feelings.

Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, students might not fully know the teacher giving the interviews and therefore there might be an element of uncertainty of trust with the researcher themselves. It was noticeable that older students of later age groups (particularly that of sixth form students) were very open and happy to discuss homework and the negative connotations it can have to their wellbeing. Although this might be down

to students being better able to express their ideas more clearly and have a better understanding of their own metacognition and their own wellbeing, it did appear that there was a pre-existing relationship between the researcher and the student that has built up from teaching them in the years prior to the research study. This relationship is, to some extent, essential to gaining the most insightful and innermost thoughts of students, and this was perhaps lacking with the younger age groups. Ethically, the research project was designed so that the ethnographer only had participants that were not taught by them. The reason for this was to limit pressure on students and the fear of consequence and allow the students to have a limited barrier to withdrawing from the research if they wished. However, this also loses a key element of a relationship based on prior experience with the researcher which can make ethnographies so fruitful when procuring data.

The ethnography was conducted over a defined two-year period, with a pilot study in 2021 and the main phase of data collection taking place from 2023 to 2024. This extended timeframe is a key strength, as it enabled the ethnography to capture a wide range of student and staff perspectives on homework across different post-pandemic school conditions. This approach allowed insight into staff and student experiences across multiple points in the school year, including periods characterised by increased workload and assessment pressure. Longitudinal designs are recognised for their ability to capture variation over time and reveal patterns that would be missed in cross sectional or survey based studies (Saldana, 2003). Ethnographies enable researchers to collect data over time periods where contexts and the lives of participants can change, thus giving researchers a fuller understanding (Neale, 2019). In the context of this thesis, students and staff were able to convey to the researcher the impact of homework on wellbeing during busier and more

stressful points of the year, such as the run up to exams and the exam season itself, for example. Both students and staff were able to openly discuss these pressures, which might have been missed if the thesis ethnography was conducted at a single time point.

This has led to a more holistic understanding of homework over a sustained period of time, as opposed to a cross-sectional survey or experiment where data is gathered in one specific time period. The research conducted in this longitudinal manner has added value and validity to the results as they show a true reflection of teacher and student experiences over the whole academic year.

A longitudinal ethnographic approach also enabled the identification of patterns that emerged only when interviewing students and staff across different phases of the school year. Homework practices, levels of perceived pressure, and the emotional impact of workload were not fixed. They fluctuated in response to the school demands such as assessment cycles, reporting periods, and curriculum demands. Capturing these fluctuations provided insight into how wellbeing was impacted. Qualitative longitudinal research is recognised for its ability to trace how experiences change over time. Neale (2019) highlights that this approach allows researchers to follow participants' changing circumstances and interpretations. Furthermore, Saldana (2003), similarly emphasises that longitudinal designs reveal patterns that would be missed in shorter or cross-sectional studies.

Also, collecting data across these varied periods also revealed contrasts that would have been missed in a survey design. Students' accounts of homework during quieter periods of the year differed from those gathered during the run-up to examinations, when stress levels and competing demands intensified. Staff also described shifts in their ability to set, mark,

and monitor homework depending on workload peaks. Cross-sectional surveys risk capturing only a momentary sentiment. Bryman (2012) supports this view stating that single-time-point designs can overlook temporal variation in experiences and behaviours. Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011) further argue that ethnographic work conducted over time is better positioned to capture participants perspective of these types of experiences.

A key strength of this study was the inclusion of both student and teacher perspectives, which allowed for a more balanced and grounded understanding of homework and wellbeing. Looking at these two voices together made it possible to see where their experiences aligned and where they differed. In multiple areas, the two groups reinforced one another's views. For example, both students and teachers consistently identified the results as a source of heightened pressure, with homework contributing to increased stress and reduced wellbeing.

There were also important points where the students and staff gave different opinions, and these differences were equally of interest. Students tended to focus on the emotional and motivational impact of homework, particularly when tasks felt repetitive, time consuming, unclear, or disconnected from what they were doing in lessons. Teachers, on the other hand, often framed homework in terms of school policy, performance management and an overly heavy focus on exams. These contrasting views emphasised and highlighted the tension between school demands and the lived experience of students, showing how the same homework task could be interpreted very differently depending on one's role within the school. These differences helped to illustrate the wider structural pressures shaping homework practices.

Bringing the two perspectives together also revealed blind spots that would have been missed if only one group had been consulted. Students described the cumulative effect of homework across subjects as a major source of pressure, something that teachers often underestimated. Teachers sometimes seemed overly focused on their own curriculum areas that they did not understand or see the accumulation of homework from students' perspective. Conversely, teachers highlighted the marking burden associated with extended written tasks, which students were not always aware of. Considering these perspectives side by side provided a more complete picture of how homework interacts with wellbeing across the school community. Overall, the inclusion of both voices strengthened the analysis and further displayed the complexities and difficulties in creating homework pieces that limit the reduction of wellbeing for students and staff.

Taken together, the findings presented in this chapter provide a clear response to the two research questions guiding this study:

Research Question 1 - What types of homework do students perceive as having a positive or negative impact on their wellbeing?

In relation to this first research question, the student data revealed that experiences of homework are shaped less by the specific task itself and more by the conditions under which homework is set, explained and managed. While students identified examples of tasks they found stressful, frustrating or 'pointless', there was no single type of homework that was consistently viewed as either beneficial or detrimental to wellbeing. Instead, their accounts emphasised the importance of predictability, purpose, realistic timing and opportunities for autonomy in managing workload and protecting their wellbeing.

Research Question 2 - What types of homework do teachers perceive as having a positive or negative impact on student wellbeing?

Furthermore, the findings from teachers indicate that they also do not attribute wellbeing outcomes to particular homework types. Teachers had various concerns relating to their wellbeing from homework, including workload, marking demands and professional autonomy. Teachers viewed homework as most supportive of student wellbeing when it was purposeful, aligned with curriculum intent and designed in ways that avoided unnecessary or repetitive marking. Approaches that allowed teachers to exercise professional judgement were consistently associated with more positive experiences for both staff and students.

Across both groups, therefore, the data suggest that the wellbeing impact of homework cannot be understood in terms of what homework is set. The variety of homework tasks and how they are set is complex, and how individuals view different homeworks varied greatly also. Instead, wellbeing can be impacted by how homework is designed, communicated and integrated into the wider school life. This is the same for both students and teachers. This shared emphasis on process rather than task type specifically provides the foundation for the conceptual model developed in the following chapter, which seeks to lay out foundations of how homework should be set that reduces the negative impact on wellbeing for students and staff.

7.5 MOVING FORWARD

Some of the issues highlighted above are difficult to address, and arguably some might not be possible to address. Regarding the curriculum and building younger students understanding of wellbeing psychologically, this could be a completely different research project and perhaps something conducted by someone who has more of a speciality and curriculum knowledge of primary school and the RSHE curriculum transitioning into secondary school. This would still face the same difficulties of this thesis in terms of being able to define and address wellbeing for younger age students, as well as the limited research from a starting point. However, it is still an important area that is topical and deserves focused attention on it. Additionally, regarding the ethical implications of interviewing students which the researcher teaches, the protection of participants would be maintained with the use of anonymous surveys or questionnaires with open ended questions. Although this would lose the ability to ask for follow up questions like the main research was able to, it could add interesting insights if it meant that students are more likely to be truthful. It would also address some of the limitations already outlined earlier of similar research which mainly uses closed questions and quantifies wellbeing and mental health.

Marking is clearly a significant contributor to teacher workload and stress levels. Although this research highlights this link, if extended writing answers are removed from homework, they will be given as classwork instead. This will do little to reduce the workload of teachers and is shifting the burden faced by teachers into a new format. It is recommended that

further research is conducted explicitly looking at the effects of marking on wellbeing, and how this can be reduced for teachers moving forward.

It is recommended also that further research is conducted into the area of wellbeing and homework. This study has researched students and teachers all various levels within one school, and research could be conducted at a broader level, such as within a Multi-Academy Trust. Furthermore, research similar to this study could be conducted on primary school children although the complexity of wellbeing would mean that revisions to questions relating to homework were revised to suit this younger demographic. Finally, due to the broad cultural backgrounds within the school the ethnography was conducted, parents were not included due to the language barriers. Future research should include parents where possible to add an additional perspective and to triangulate what students, teachers and parents' views are regarding homework and wellbeing.

A further limitation of the thesis is that it did not employ a standardised measure of mental health or wellbeing for either students or teachers. Although the thesis wanted to exclusively use qualitative methodology as there was a gap in the research for this, the results could have been enhanced further with a mixed method approach by using some established quantitative scales. As a result, it is not possible to make objective direct comparisons between students or staff, or to examine how subjective accounts aligned with established indicators of wellbeing. Qualitative accounts provided rich insight into participants' lived experiences, but the absence of a validated measure limits the extent to which findings can be compared systematically, or compared in regards to levels of significance. There are widely used wellbeing instruments that future research could incorporate to strengthen comparability. For example, the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental

Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) is frequently used in educational research to capture general wellbeing (Tennant *et al.*, 2007). For younger participants, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is commonly used to explore behavioural and emotional dimensions of wellbeing in school-aged children (Goodman, 2001). Including one or more of these quantitative based measures or surveys alongside qualitative data in future research would enable more precise comparison between students and teachers and provide a clearer picture of how subjective experiences relate to pre-established wellbeing indicators.

The discussion showed that homework played a complex role in school life and on wellbeing, with students and teachers often recognising similar pressures but experiencing them in different ways. It highlighted how there were no specific types of homework that had a positive impact on wellbeing by supporting learning or confidence. Conversely, there were no specific types of homework that had a negative impact on wellbeing, such as stress, time or pressures. Furthermore, by linking these findings to the wider literature and the theoretical ideas introduced earlier, the chapter demonstrated how wellbeing was shaped not only by the tasks themselves but also by expectations, workload, and the broader culture of the school. These insights pointed towards practical changes that could make homework more manageable and meaningful, and they set the stage for the final chapter, which summarised the overall contribution of the study and identified areas for further work.

8 CONCLUSION

This chapter brings the thesis to a close by drawing together the key points from the research and restating the contribution the thesis makes to understanding homework and wellbeing. It summarises the main findings from students and teachers, highlights the implications for school practice, and reflects on what the study adds to the existing literature. The chapter also considers the limitations of the research and identifies areas where further work would be valuable, particularly in relation to how different types of homework are designed and supported in schools. By bringing these elements together, the chapter provides a final overview of the study and reinforces the importance of examining homework through a wellbeing lens. Through this lens, the thesis creates the 4p Model of Good Homework Practice which will be outlined in full later in this chapter.

After reviewing the results of the study, the earlier model of homework (Figure 1., Pilot study section) needs to be updated. Although pre-learning worked as a model for some students, it must be recognised that this model was created as a preliminary starting point to creating a model of positive wellbeing homework. The pilot study was limited to five students who were exclusively Sixth Form students and a single teacher, and as such, the model lacked generalisability and indeed validity. Furthermore, the model was heavily based on the researcher's own direct experience, and the main research has added value and different perspectives from wider audiences and specialisms of teachers, as well as having a much wider audience of students from different age groups.

This research project aimed to establish what types of homework (if any) had a positive or negative impact on student wellbeing. The overall answer to that question and conclusion is ultimately there are no definitive types that a consensus of students or staff find positive or negative. Realistically, there is no single homework type that is ideal for staff or students' wellbeing, as each stakeholder will have different needs, demands and focus resulting from the different subject and age group they are within or teach. This is also liable to fluctuate from individual to individual due to personal preferences also. Instead, improving wellbeing of staff and students is something that can be achieved prior to any homework being set. It seems apparent that to improve wellbeing of both staff and students, the focus needs to be on the planning and rationale behind homework, and making sure that it is fit for purpose, planned for in advance and ultimately is for the benefit of the student, and not distributed for any other reason. The model created below should be a good fit and compromise for both student and staff wellbeing.

The student themes presented in the results chapter revealed a clear and consistent pattern in how students experience homework, and these patterns directly informed the development of the Four Ps model. Across the interviews and focus groups, students described homework in terms of its emotional impact, its usefulness, the time it consumed, and the policies or expectations that shaped how it was set. These broad categories were reflected in the sub-themes identified in the analysis, including stress, sleep loss, workload, unpredictability of deadlines, lack of clarity, and the perceived pointlessness of certain tasks. Students also highlighted positive experiences, such as receiving meaningful feedback, using helpful online platforms, and completing tasks that felt purposeful or confidence-building. Taken together, these themes demonstrated that students' wellbeing was shaped not by the

type of homework itself, but by the conditions surrounding it. Specific types of homework did not positively or negatively impact the wellbeing of all students, however, how and why it was set could impact wellbeing.

The negative themes, such as stress, sleep disruption, and feelings of punishment or pressure, pointed to the need for homework to be positive, predictable and planned. Students repeatedly described how short deadlines, last-minute tasks, and inconsistent expectations created anxiety and forced them to sacrifice sleep, leisure, or family time. This directly informed the Positive, Predictable and Planned components of the model, which emphasise the importance of clear timelines, realistic expectations, and curriculum-aligned homework design, and took away the emphasis or focus on punishment or school sanctions. Similarly, the positive themes highlighted the importance of purpose and positivity. Students valued homework when they understood why it had been set, when it was explicitly linked to their learning, and when it contributed to their confidence or enjoyment of a subject. These findings linked closely with the Purposeful and Positive components of the model, which stress the need for clarity, relevance, and a constructive approach to homework.

The teacher themes presented in the results chapter revealed a similarly consistent pattern in how staff experience homework, and these patterns led to the development of the Four Ps model. Teachers described homework in terms of its impact on workload, the pressures created by policy and accountability systems, consequences of setting and marking homework, and the extent to which homework genuinely supported learning. These broad categories were reflected in the sub-themes identified in the analysis, including high marking

loads, follow-up administration, limited progress from certain tasks, feelings of being mistrusted or monitored, and the strain of conforming to inconsistent or unclear policies. Teachers also highlighted positive experiences, such as when homework improved lessons, supported independent learning, or allowed them to provide meaningful feedback. Teachers especially appreciated homework when they could see their students making clear progress.

The negative themes, such as excessive marking, lack of time, and the pressure to conform to policy, pointed directly to the need for homework to be both predictable and planned. These findings directly informed the Predictable and Planned components of the model, which emphasise the importance of realistic timelines, manageable marking schedules, and curriculum related homework tasks. Similarly, the positive themes highlighted the importance of purpose and positivity. Teachers valued homework when it genuinely supported learning, improved lessons, or allowed them to provide effective feedback. These findings aligned closely with the Purposeful and Positive components of the model, which stress the need for homework to be meaningful, relevant, and beneficial for both teachers and students.

The combined student and teacher themes showed that wellbeing was shaped not by the type of homework set, but how and/or why it was set. Students spoke about stress, sleep loss, unclear expectations, and unpredictable deadlines, while teachers described heavy marking loads, time pressures, and the strain of conforming to inconsistent policies. Both groups also highlighted positive experiences when homework felt meaningful, well-timed,

and genuinely connected to learning. These shared patterns demonstrated that the core issues were purpose, emotional experience, time, and planning.

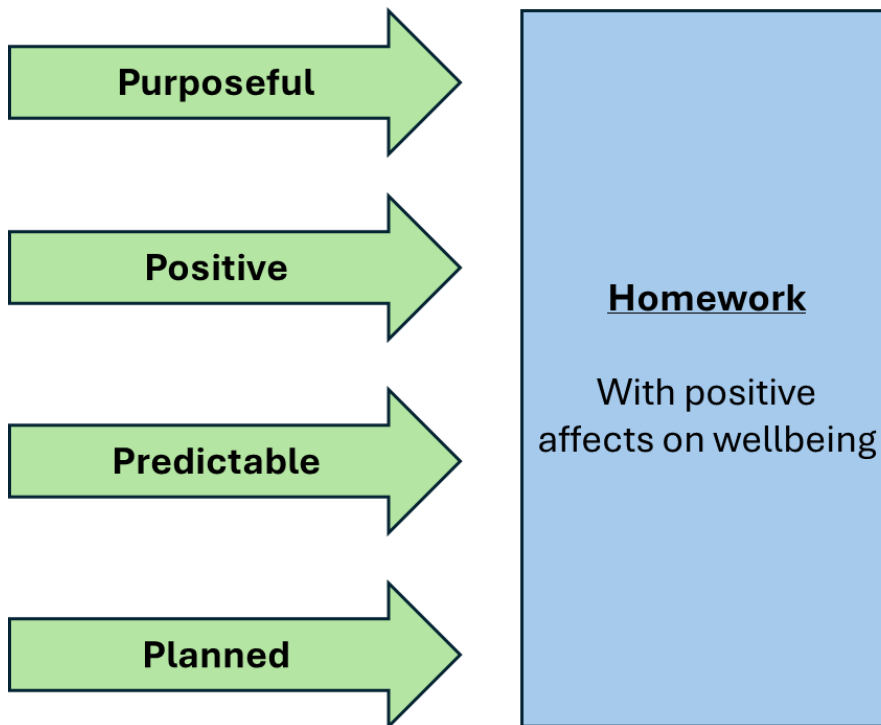
Students valued homework when they understood why it had been set and when it supported their progress in lessons. Teachers valued homework when it improved lessons, supported learning, or allowed them to give effective feedback which then positively impacted progress. These findings directly informed the Purposeful and Positive elements of the model.

Students and teachers also emphasised the importance of predictability. Students struggled with short deadlines and competing responsibilities, while teachers struggled with marking demands. This led directly to the Predictable element of the model.

Finally, both students and teachers highlighted the impact of inconsistent policies and poor planning. Students noticed variation between subjects, and teachers described displayed unclear or varied expectations. This shaped the Planned element of the model.

Combining the above, the thesis showed a consistent need for homework practices that are purposeful, positive, predictable, and planned. The Four Ps model therefore emerged as a direct and logical response to the issues raised by both students and teachers, offering a framework that places wellbeing at the centre of homework design. The Four P's model of Good Homework Practice is illustrated overleaf in Figure 18, and more detail on each element is explained after.

Figure 18: Four Ps of Good Homework Practice



The Four Ps of Good Homework is thought to promote positive wellbeing for students and for staff by following the four steps. This is a heavily reduced model compared to the model outlined in the original pilot study and this is seen as a necessary and positive reduction as it should be possible to apply to multiple subjects, year groups and key stages. There is also the further possibility that this model might be able to be applied to primary settings also, however, this would need further research as the model has been created exclusively using an ethnography in a secondary setting with secondary students and teachers. When breaking down and exploring each part of The Four Ps of Good Homework, each factor is equally important and impactful as the other. Below is a further elaboration to each section.

Purposeful

Homework must have a set purpose which is primarily and exclusively for the benefit of the student and teacher setting it. This purpose must be to promote progress, whether academically or interpersonally. Homework should not be set for any other purpose and should not be set for the sake of fulfilling a homework timetable, quota, or the benefit of parties external to the classroom such as SLT, or external agencies such as OFSTED. By removing these pressures and demands from above, teachers will be able to focus on setting homework only if it is purposeful for the students that they teach. If these demands can be avoided, it will give teachers full autonomy to choose to set homework only if they believe it will be useful and beneficial to themselves or their students. This ultimately gives trust back to the teachers to allow them to make decisions on what and how to teach certain aspects of their curriculum, and this autonomy will additionally improve on the wellbeing of teachers.

Furthermore, the purpose of the homework should be explicitly explained to students as well, so that they can identify the rationale behind why the homework has been set and therefore will place more value on the homework piece. If they know their teachers are not confirming to policies or timetables and are exclusively setting homework for their own progress and benefit, students themselves are more likely to value the homework and will be able to see its purpose more clearly. It became apparent in this ethnography that the older the students were, the more aware they were of teachers setting work to conform to policies rather than have an explicit and primary purpose of progressing students. Students will be more likely to value the homework if they can see this clear purpose of why the tasks have been set. It is recommended that teachers explain why they are setting homework and

what the benefit to the students is for them completing this work. Currently, some homework practice treats students too passively where teachers give homework to students and expect them to do it just because they have been instructed to.

Positive

Homework should be positive and should be set to enhance the students academically, interpersonally, or to enhance the love of learning or for a subject. Homework should not be set as a punishment or as a form of catching up outside of the classroom. Where possible, homework should be set in such a way where the student enjoys the homework and can see a positive impact of the homework on their schoolwork and/or abilities.

Too often teachers and students cited that homework was set due to not finishing work in lesson or having too many time constraints that resulted in work having to be completed outside of lesson. Some students stated that this often felt as a punishment for not completing work in lesson. This should never be the case. Setting homework because of not completing classwork will only lead to negative view of school, the teachers and the work that they are completing. This ultimately will not lead to students enjoying school and will not foster a love of learning that education strives for. Homework should never be set as any sort of punishment as the long term effects are likely to be detrimental to students wellbeing and how they perceive education.

Predictable

Homework must be predictable and therefore there must be plenty of time to complete work and to amend staff and students' schedules around this homework. Students need to be aware in advance of this homework so that they can plan their time and when to complete this homework. Furthermore, this will also aid teachers' heavy workload with marking, and they can plan times to mark homework well in advance. Too often students were set work with short deadlines which meant that students were unlikely to complete the work on time. Furthermore, these short homework deadlines also meant that students would often have to sacrifice other activities outside of school such as sports, social, religious, family plans or even sleep. This can lead to a decline in student wellbeing and again, can lead to negative views of education and school.

Unpredictable and short deadlines can also lead to a rise in anxiety and increase the likelihood of school sanctions and also means that students can become overwhelmed with work that can increase at short notice. Students need to have a routine or awareness of when and how homework is set so that they can plan their time effectively and can feel that they can meet these deadlines without sacrificing other aspects of their lives. This is likely to lead to non-academic benefits such as planning and time management as well. It is important that these deadlines and time frames are realistic and can foster these skills, however.

From a teacher perspective, predictable homework (and resulting marking, if applicable) can also help manage their workload and consequently their wellbeing also. By knowing how

and when they are setting homework and how this contributes towards their curriculum will likely lead to them being able to manage their workload appropriately.

Planned

Homework that is planned as part of the curriculum will likely have the most significant impact on a student academically. If homework is planned to be set as certain parts of a course at the start of a topic, term, or even academic year, it will be scheduled at the most effective and impactful time of content delivery. This is far more effective than routinely setting homework to conform to homework timetables or for the benefit of others external to the classroom.

Teachers should look holistically with a top-down viewpoint on their curriculum and plan where and when homework is likely to have a positive impact. It should be common practice for teachers to have the autonomy to look at their curriculum design and highlight spaces where homework should be set and how this can be timely to raising attainment of students. Equally, it should also be identified where homework should not be set due to the small impact this might have on students' attainment. This should be unique and tailored to the needs of the curriculum that the teacher delivers and should not be a one-size fits all approach that some school policies have, such as homework timetables, where homework is set systemically across all subjects and/or year groups.

Again, sharing this with students every term will give students an understanding of when, how and why homework is set. These plans can be shared with family members as well so

that multiple stakeholders are aware of when homework is set and this will likely lead to an improvement of the value placed upon homework and the rationale as to why it is set.

When looking at The Four Ps of Good Homework, it is important to recognise that they are interlinked and overlap with one another. For example, homework that is predictable is clearly planned, and homework that is purposeful is more likely to be experienced positively. All four elements are essential in reducing the negative effects of homework on staff and students' wellbeing. However, for these principles to be implemented effectively, they need to be supported consistently across the school. This requires commitment from senior leaders, but also from classroom teachers and the students who engage with the tasks. Rather than viewing this as a strict hierarchy, it is more appropriate to consider it as a whole-school approach in which all stakeholders contribute to creating a culture that values purposeful, planned and wellbeing-focused homework. Such a culture would allow teachers to exercise professional autonomy without fear of criticism if they choose not to set homework that does not align with the Four Ps. Embedding these principles into policy and practice has the potential to improve wellbeing for both staff and students and may help to re-establish a sense of enjoyment and purpose in learning.

Personal Reflections and Implementation

Being a teacher at middle management level as a head of department, I have reasonable, but not complete, autonomy of the curriculum design that I have led upon. I have set homework as "Pre-Learning" for many years. Pre-learning is homework that is set prior to the lesson, as opposed to after the lesson, and allows students to have the freedom to

prepare for a lesson in advance in a variety of ways that works for them. This can include traditional note taking, mind maps, flash cards or using laptops or newer technologies such as phones or tablets. Before this study, I believed that “Pre-Learning” was the most ideal and impactful homework to set students, and this was reinforced by the original pilot study. However, this research study has highlighted how a variety of students enjoyed and valued a variety of other homework types. Some of these homework types were “Post-Learning” homework such as essay writing, consolidation and assessment for example. This has led me to realise that it is actually the foundations underlying the homework that is the true reason of why students are more likely to value homework or not.

Despite me setting this homework exclusively almost every lesson, students value this homework type as it is purposeful, positive, predictable and planned. The frequency of the work set could easily become a barrier or promote negativity towards homework, however, the foundations of the ‘Four P’s’ seem to be significant contributing factors as to why students value this “Pre-Learning” homework, and indeed other types of homework. These four principles should be applied throughout all of the school, and potentially beyond the school that this project was conducted.

As an established middle leader for ten years and with a reputation via exam result performance and observable practice, I have been able to implement my homework strategies to other departments by sharing good practice. Other teachers have implemented my homework strategies and have noted the positive impact on wellbeing on their students, themselves and their staff. At the very end of this research project, I have been privileged enough to gain a promotion to SLT where I am able to have more insight and

ability to change policy and practice on a whole school level, as well as have an impact in multiple schools within the trust. The aim now is to implement the 'Four P' model throughout the school this ethnography was conducted, and if successful, beyond to other schools also.

To successfully implement the 'Four P' model, I aim to use this thesis to gain further credibility of my ideas with this newly created model. I also wish to use this thesis to show real and highly relevant contextual student and staff voice via the ethnographical conversations and pictures taken of both student and staff work. These will be powerful tools to show the positive and negative impact homework has on these stakeholders. At a SLT level, I will also be highly involved in curriculum design and I wish to bring this model to the fore when overlooking and advising staff, and I will be in a position to contribute to whole school change not only from a curriculum perspective, but also from a student and staff wellbeing perspective. I aim to promote the importance of wellbeing and to put it on an equal importance to attainment and achievement and further promote the importance of wellbeing beyond the traditional and academic subjects that schools can sometimes be too focused on. By meeting HODs and other SLT members across multiple schools, advising on curriculum intent, implementation and impact, and sharing my own experience and resulting model, I aim to lead improvements in both homework practice and student and staff wellbeing.

Finally, due to the lack of research previously conducted in this area, the "Four Ps of Good Homework Practice" has been created organically from student and teacher voice and examples of their homework. This makes this model unique as there is no such model that

interlinks wellbeing and homework. It is therefore recommended that not only do teachers adopt and implement this model, but also more research is needed in this area to improve and update the model or create new models that can improve the wellbeing of both students and staff.

The thesis demonstrated that homework had a mixed and often uneven impact on wellbeing, shaped not only by the tasks themselves but also by wider expectations, pressures, and school routines. Students and teachers described similar challenges, including stress, time constraints, and the difficulty of balancing academic demands with personal wellbeing. At the same time, the study showed that certain types of homework could support confidence, independence, and a sense of progress when they were purposeful and manageable. By examining these experiences in detail, the research offered a clearer understanding of how homework operated in everyday school life and highlighted practical steps that could make it more supportive for both students and staff. The thesis therefore contributed to ongoing discussions about workload, wellbeing, and educational practice, and pointed towards the need for continued attention to how homework is designed and used in schools. Finally, this thesis put forward an important model that teachers should adopt when setting homework, and it is believed this will improve the wellbeing of both students and teachers.

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10 APPENDICES

10.1 APPENDIX 1 - INFORMATION LEAFLET FOR PARENTS AND STUDENTS

Wellbeing and Homework Study Information Leaflet

Researcher:

Matthew John

Description of the Study:

The study that you are invited to take part in will consider the effect of homework on staff and students wellbeing. You will be invited to take part in a focus group or an informal interview about the effects of homework on wellbeing and discuss the benefits and drawbacks on different types of homework you have experienced. You might be asked to explain some of the work you have completed (or not completed) and your thoughts on these.

Invitation to be invited to the study:

You are invited to take part in this study. You can withdraw yourself from the study at any point during interviews and focus group discussions. You will have up to 2 weeks after any data collected to withdraw this data. Interviews and focus groups will likely be a maximum of 20 minutes long in length and will be audio recorded so that transcripts can be made afterwards. This transcript will be available at request for up to 2 weeks after the interview.

Confidentiality and Anonymity:

Recordings and transcripts will be digitally stored for the duration of the study and these will be via secure digital storage. All participants information and data given will be anonymous and confidential. Access to these will be myself and university staff linked to the research project.

Results of the Study

There is no intention to give participants individual feedback though this is available if requested. The results of the study will be published as a EdD Thesis but may also be used in academic articles. In the latter case anonymity is still preserved.

Funding of the Study

The study is partially funded by xxxxxxxxxxxx, and partially funded by the EdD student – Matthew John.

Contact Details for the study:

Matthew John

XXXXXX

XXXXXX

XXXXXX

XXXXXX

10.2 APPENDIX 2 - CONSENT FORM FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am inviting your child to take part in a research project on wellbeing and homework, as described on the Information Leaflet.

- I have read the Information Leaflet and I understand what is involved in the research.
- I understand my child does not have to take part, but that, if I do agree to participate, I can nonetheless later request to withdraw them from the study at any time, without saying why and without any negative consequence.
- I consent to copies of their homework that has been set to be photographed and/or photocopied. (Please sign individual pieces of homework that you are happy to be photographed, discussed and potentially used as evidence or examples in future publications of this research).
- I can also ask to have any of my child's data withdrawn from the study up to 2 weeks from which I have signed from the date below.—To withdraw from the study, please email the researcher via the contact details below.

Matthew John

[Email - XXXX](#)

I have read the above and I give my consent for my child to participating in the research project.

I consent to my child's interview and or participation in a focus group being recorded.

I consent to pictures/photographs of my child's work set and/or marked for this study and I will sign individual pieces of homework that I am happy to be used in the research as listed above.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Dear Student,

I am inviting you to take part in a research project on wellbeing and homework, as described on the Information Leaflet.

- I have read the Information Leaflet and I understand what is involved in the research.
- I understand my I do not have to take part, but that, if I do agree to participate, I can nonetheless later request to withdraw them from the study at any time, without saying why and without any negative consequence.
- I consent to copies of my homework that has been set to be photographed and/or photocopied. (Please sign individual pieces of homework that you are happy to be photographed, discussed and potentially used as evidence or examples in future publications of this research).
- I can also ask to have any of my data withdrawn from the study until up to 2 weeks from which I have signed from the date below. To withdraw from the study, please email the researcher via the contact details below.

Matthew John

[Email - XXXX](#)

I have read the above and I give my consent to participate in the research project.

I consent to my interview and or participation in a focus group being recorded.

I consent to pictures/photographs of my work set and/or marked for this study and I will sign individual pieces of homework that I am happy to be used in the research as listed above.

Name: _____

Date: _____

10.3 APPENDIX 3 - TEACHER INFORMATION LEAFLET

I am currently working towards a Doctor of Education degree at the University of Birmingham, and I am conducting my research to contribute towards my thesis. I am aiming to investigate the effects of homework on staff and student wellbeing and aim to establish any benefits or drawbacks of different homework types.

Description of the Study and what is involved

The study that you are invited to take part in will consider the effect of homework on staff and students wellbeing. You will be invited to take part in an informal interview about the effects of homework on wellbeing and discuss the benefits and drawbacks on different types of homework and the experiences you have had setting this work, marking this work and administration involved related to homework in general. You will be asked on your experiences as a teacher regarding the usefulness of homework and how it has or has not helped your teaching, as well as effects it has had on your wellbeing and spare time outside of school. I will also request pictures and/or photographs of work marked to include in my research and aid our interview. Any photographs/photocopies of work will seek permission beforehand and with your full knowledge.

Invitation to be invited to the study

You are invited to take part in this study. This study overall will include sixth form students and members of staff. You can withdraw yourself from the study at any point during interviews discussions. You will have up to 2 weeks after any data collected to withdraw this data. Interviews will likely be a maximum of 20 minutes long in length and will be audio recorded so that transcripts can be made afterwards. This transcript will be available at request for up to 2 weeks after the interview.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Recordings and transcripts will be digitally stored for the duration of the study, and these will be via secure digital storage. All participants information and data given will be anonymous and confidential. Access to these will be myself and university staff linked to the research project.

Results of the Study

There will be no individual feedback, though this is available if requested. A brief notice will be placed in the school's newsletter. The results of the study will eventually be published as an EdD Thesis but may also be used in academic articles. In the latter case anonymity is still preserved.

Funding of the Study

The study is partially funded by xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx, and partially funded by the EdD student – Matthew John.

Contact Details for the study

Matthew John

Email – XXXXX

Consent

The consent for this study will be an opt-in consent. You will be given a separate consent form for you to review with this information sheet. Any work photocopied or photographed will only be done so with your consent prior to the study.

10.4 APPENDIX 4 - TEACHER CONSENT FORM

Consent Form for members of staff

Dear Staff member,

I am inviting you to take part in a research project on wellbeing and homework, as described on the Information Leaflet.

Please read the following points and if you agree with them, please give your consent to participate in my Wellbeing and Homework research project.

- I have read the Information Leaflet and I understand what is involved in the research.
- I understand I do not have to take part, but that, if I do agree to participate, I can nonetheless later request to withdraw from the study at any time, without saying why and without any negative consequence.
- I consent to copies of homework to be photographed and/or photocopied. (Please sign individual pieces of homework that you are happy to be photographed, discussed and potentially used as evidence or examples in future publications of this research). Any identifying features on your photocopied work such as name, form group etc. will be deleted so that you remain anonymous, and the work is confidential.
- I can also ask to have any of my data withdrawn from the research up to 2 weeks from when I signed to participate. To withdraw from the study, please email me via the contact details below.

Matthew John
Job Title - XXXX

Email XXXX

I have read the above and I give consent to participate in the research project.

I consent to my interview being recorded.

Name: _____

Date: _____

10.5 APPENDIX 5 - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH PROBES AND PROMPTS

Q1.

Issue/ Topic	Possible Question	Possible follow-up questions (Prompts)	Probes
Effects on wellbeing	How does homework effect wellbeing in your view?	<p>What would you say the positive impacts of homework is?</p> <p>What would you say the negative impacts of homework is?</p> <p>When you are set homework, what do you typically think or feel?</p>	<p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>Do you still think and/or feel that later on?</p>

Q2.

Issue/ Topic	Possible Question	Possible follow-up questions (Prompts)	Probes
Effects on wellbeing	Are there any types of homework that you are set that in your opinion particularly has a negative effect on your wellbeing?	<p>What would you say is the negative impact?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about specifically how it has a negative impact?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about the homework task that you were set?</p>	<p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about that?</p>

Q3.

Issue/ Topic	Possible Question	Possible follow-up questions (Prompts)	Probes
Effects on wellbeing	Are there any types of homework that you are set that in your opinion particularly has a positive effect on your wellbeing?	<p>What would you say is the positive impact?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about specifically how it has a positive impact?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about the homework task that you were set?</p>	<p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about that?</p>

Q4.

Issue/ Topic	Possible Question	Possible follow-up questions (Prompts)	Probes
Effects on wellbeing	If you could change the homework policy or the type of homework you get, what would you change?	<p>Would you want homework at all?</p> <p>Are there any types of homework you would want to stop getting?</p> <p>Are there any types of homework that you would want more of?</p>	<p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about that?</p>

Q5.

Issue/ Topic	Possible Question	Possible follow-up questions (Prompts)	Probes
Effects on wellbeing	If you did not need to complete/mark homework, what would you do with the time you have now gained?	<p>What activities would you do?</p> <p>How would you use the time?</p> <p>Would you still use this time towards schoolwork?</p>	<p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>Can you tell me more about that?</p>

Q6. (Homework item present only)

Issue/ Topic	Possible Question	Possible follow-up questions (Prompts)	Probes
Effects on wellbeing	Tell me about this homework piece that you have.	<p>Why did/didn't you do/set this piece of homework?</p> <p>Was this piece of homework useful?</p> <p>Would you do/set this homework again?</p>	<p>Can you explain the reasons for why did/didn't you do/set this piece of homework</p> <p>How was this useful?</p> <p>Why do you think you would/wouldn't?</p>

S19Y10

Wed, Mar 20, 2024 10:33AM • 6:57

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

homework, negative effect, wellbeing, revise, types, online, question, happy, affect, understand, hard, good, lesson, answer, maths, essay, struggled, different types, booklet, repetitive

SPEAKERS

Researcher 1

Researcher 1 00:02

How does homework affects wellbeing in your view?

S19Y10:

00:11

What do you mean? Like, like my mental health?

Researcher 1 00:14

It can mean that if that's what you think it means.

S19Y10:

00:19

I feel like some like obviously nobody like really like enjoys doing homework but I, I think you actually like generally helps me because I was doing maths homework from yesterday. And I think like it just helps me in my class because when I do my homework, I'm good in the class, when I don't do the homework. I'm like a bit confused. I think homework is actually good for me. Even though some people might not like homework, obviously. Yeah.

Researcher 1 00:40

So you would say is actually good for your wellbeing?

S19Y10:

Yeah.

Researcher 1 00:40

Does it make you feel more relaxed or happier that you know the content you've done the things?

S19Y10:

00:53

It like, boosts my confidence. Because like, I'm like, I can like talk in class. And if I get like, picked on for a question, I understand that obviously, because I did the homework the night before or something. So I think yeah, makes me like more confident or like, yeah, just boost my self esteem.

Researcher 1 01:10

Good. Out of interest, how would it what would happen if you got some homework that you just hadn't got a clue about? You're really struggling in? How would that affect your confidence?

S19Y10:

01:27

I don't I don't think it affect me. I think like to just like, make me like, like give me like a more reason to work harder. Like, because if I had like homework that had not appeared Well, obviously I look online, and I see and I still don't understand. I'd go to the teacher. Obviously we're like, can you help me with this? Obviously because I don't understand it. But I feel like it just I don't think affects me, but like it just like makes like it makes me more feel pressure to like, work more harder.

Researcher 1 01:59

This so in terms of like the types of homework. Are there any types of homework that you have set that in your opinion has a negative effect on wellbeing? So the types of tasks you're given?

S19Y10:

02:13

I don't think so. To be honest, like, I don't find the homework like hard or like, I don't feel like yeah, look homeworks fine for me. Like I'll do it quickly and I'll be fine with it. There's never homework like I struggled really hard. So I don't think had a negative effect on me.

Researcher 1 02:31

But what about the like the different types so for example, you might have like, homework to do a presentation or group work. Or an essay or exam questions or worksheets or prep work or drawing images like email or all these different types. Are there any types of homes that are given to you that you think have a negative effect?

S19Y10:

02:55

I don't really think so. To be honest, like I feel like calm actually good for me because when I do, I see myself and the teacher also sees like they can tell when you haven't done your homework or not. So I don't think has a negative effect on me.

Researcher 1 03:08

And if I flip that around them, are there any types of homeworks like those things like presentations, diagrams, questions, essays, all this kind of stuff. Are there any types of homework that you actually think it has a positive effect on your wellbeing? is good for you?

S19Y10:

03:23

I think so like I say I have set muscle work. And if I do like when I do online, like when I understand it, like I'm really like I get happy about it because I'm like I understand everything that's going on, and it just boosts my self esteem obviously because I understand it and I'm like whizzing through it I think it's gonna make me feel happy.

Researcher 1 03:46

So in terms like the way you're told to do that online, do you prefer online as opposed to a worksheet or a booklet that you take home?

S19Y10:

03:56

I prefer online. because when I get the answer wrong, either like teach me how to do it or like show me like the answer the correct answer. So I can try again until I get that answer. And I'll try again on the next question.

Researcher 1 04:08

Interesting. So, if you could change the homework policy, or the types of home when you get into school, what would you change if you change anything at all? I imagine you're in charge of school. Yeah, you're in charge of homework. What would you do anything differently?

S19Y10:

04:26

I don't really think so. To be honest, I don't get that homework that often when I do like, I'm fine with the I don't think I've changed about it.

Researcher 1 04:33

Roughly how often do you get homework?

S19Y10:

04:39

From English, I barely get it. I get it every time and the time before holiday. And for maths. I get it a bit often like I don't get it on my summer students as well. But chemistry I get no biology I get it like almost every lesson.

Researcher 1 04:53

Interesting. Are you okay to get in biology homework, almost every lesson is that okay?

S19Y10:

04:58

Sometimes no, it's a bit of a drag like because when I get home, I want to do to my own revision and doing homework. And homework just takes up time, even when like, I understand the topic, and I'm like, it's just like the same thing every single time. It's like repetitive. So like sometimes I just say drag, right? Because every lesson sometimes I want to break right?

Researcher 1 05:17

Yeah, makes complete sense. And so here's a question for you and if you did not have to complete what you do the time that you've now gained, so imagine there's no homework. Yeah, what would you then do that time?

S19Y10:

05:32

I probably just revised like a home or I just like chill, like, because I don't want to like, like do homework every day like. Sometimes want to take a break so that either like just chill that day or to take or revise? That's it.

Researcher 1 05:48

Do you think you would revise?

S19Y10:

05:51

I haven't really revise. I want to take a test coming up tonight. But my mom was like wants me to revise in that.

Researcher 1 06:01

That's all my question. Well, unless did you bring sometimes report in there bring a piece of homework that you want to talk particularly talk about in a good or a bad way. Is repeater home that you'd like to kind of go oh, look at this. This is really good. I really like this or I don't like this.

06:16

Maths watch online, I think I think is really good. I like it. Because when that each topic, there's a video you can watch so I'll try it. I don't understand that. Watch the video that comes in. And I try again. And I always get most of the time I get so I think it's good because yeah, good.

T10 Interview

Thu, Jun 29, 2023 1:53PM • 28:00

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

homework, learning, kids, teachers, set, idea, school, curriculum, staff, reading, teach, work, policy, bit, cultural capital, expectation, pressure, fits, develops, integrated

00:01

So first question is, how does homework affect wellbeing in your view?

00:19

T10

Very much depends on the expectation of the organisation. You're working within Disney. I think that kind of fundamentally the principle that I work from all the icon of maybe identify most is the fact that kind of research around homework suggests that when done poorly, it's it has almost no effects on or positive effects on attainment and therefore, if a school is kind of dogmatically enforcing teachers setting homework, then it can it can be, it can become, and almost certainly will become problematic for wellbeing because ostensibly, you're asking people to do something that has no no real point in a real value, no effect and whenever we're doing anything in school that's that's the question, isn't it? No, what's the effects? What impact is it haven't had in so I think yeah, if you're looking at something that is not impactful, and it's but it's but it's insisted upon, then you can be problematic, where school for wellbeing, where schools integrate homework as part of a wider curriculum, so it's kind of integrated into schemes of learning and it's complimentary. It's not additional, it's not just kind of things have been missed out, then perhaps it would have less of an impact maybe could have a positive impact on teachers wellbeing because you're covering more curriculum, you're covering more more content. Therefore kind of putting less pressure on you maybe in the classroom, and maybe alleviating kind of some of that exam, stress pressure that we all feel. So it really depends, I think, in terms of homework, how it's how it works within a school. I think the reality for me is I've never really seen a model of it working well. I think it means kind of really planning and considering your curriculum in a, in a in a kind of holistic way to get it to like, like I say, to incorporate homework within it. I think where you've got kind of models of curriculum where you have Thematic Learning rather than kind of essentially convertible towards your exam that lends itself more to being able to kind of integrate workable, useful homework into colour schemes or learning. So I think from a from a from a staff point of view, most of the time, staff are forced to in my opinion, my read of it is that staff are forced to do homework because of parental pressure rather than early you know, strong belief that it is pedagogically, you know, kind of teaching and learning wise, the best the best practice is to it's to assuage anxious or pushy parents, because they feel like it shouldn't be having homework. And yeah, and I think that yeah, so for, for kind of stuff wellbeing that's problematic because like I say, it doesn't make much sense. In terms of pupils, I think it's the

same issue, isn't it? I think that when it doesn't have a significant impact, I think they kind of see through it really they understand. Maybe there are exceptions to the rule pupils what pupil wise where they feel more kind of supported or competent. There's a kind of psychological thing about if you give them homework, they feel that they kind of continuing to achieve that they're getting through. They are they continue to work towards a goal they're kind of anxious to achieve, but again, you know, there's the other side of it, you know, should we be working on the anxiety around if a kid is particularly concerned about, you know, overwhelming academic success that we need to kind of not temper in terms of their ambition, but just the anxiety they feel around that? And actually, just if homework is allowing it, you put in a sticking plaster over a bigger problem. So I think probably when it's done badly, will affect the wellbeing of students. And I think this kind of idea of pandering to parents. I think that schools need to be a bit stronger. I think it fits in with a kind of a broader kind of societal political approach towards parental voice, which assumes that the parents know what's best for their children in the face of professionals. So when professionals say one thing parents say another and parents are supposed to be listened to, and as a parent I kind of understand why I would want to be listened to in a certain circumstances. I kind of see that but the idea of questioning a doctor about a particular way a particular kind of type of treatment kind of goes with that. Why would a teacher be questioned about their particular approach to to their profession? So do we have a responsibility to manage the wellbeing of our parents by being a bit firmer, by being a bit stronger by being more confident in the way that we deliver education and homework included, and not bow down to them? And if we genuinely think that evidence suggests that and it does, the evidence suggests that homework is effective when it is integrated into curriculum, then should we not be making kind of biggest strides to integrate it practically into our schemes of learning, rather than having a bolt on? But if you're going to do that, say more question, we need time. Within resources to be able to do that.

05:44

Interesting, very thorough. And I guess one of the follow up questions from that is, do you think you personally or maybe teachers in general, have autonomy of whether they set homework or not

05:59

T10

I do, I wouldn't have I feel very little pressure because I feel quite strongly about the the argument I have kind of against setting it for the sake of setting it. I think, you know, I'm relatively experienced. I'm an older teacher. But I could see younger teachers feeling the pressure of kind of expectation from senior member staff. I will robustly have a frank exchange of views with my bosses, about the practicality of homework. So yeah, I don't feel pressure to necessarily set homework. I genuinely I set homework when I see the purpose of it. You Yeah. And typically, as an English teacher, I don't set homework in key stage three, what I say is and in fact, we're explicit about this No, in English we did seven. The expectation for your homework is that you read you know for English, there is no there is no, there is no bigger factor in your success, English. Outside of the frequency of the reading, and the breadth of the reading. One of the biggest problems we have in the school that you will know is that our kids lack of cultural capital and our kids can't get out there and they suddenly see all the things in the world but you know, perhaps me as a middle class white guy who went to the south of France every year on holiday and sat around a table of academics talking about, you know, politics, how our kids are exposed to the worlds that I

was exposed to around a dinner table is through literature, through books through newspapers in through kind of, I guess a certain website, websites or whatever. So yeah, I think that I don't feel particular pressure to set it. It frustrates me when when there is pressure, because I know that it's not a genuine belief from the people who put the pressure on it's because of pushy parents on the whole that's my experience. That's my perception of it.

07:55

What about homework timetables?

07:59

T10

Pointless unless it's a homework time. I think I've said the homework timetable is pointless is arbitrary. I feel the same way about that as I feel about as I feel about kind of putting a timescale on marking a mark when I need to mark it as according to my schemes of learning, I set homework according to schemes of learning. If you say you've got to set homework every other week, well actually does the and even with an even with a with a planned scheme of learned incorporates homework, there is no guarantee that you get to the point that you want to get to in your teaching by the time you are kind of arbitrarily expected. So homework, so it's it. I think it makes no sense to me it's again, it's a way of It's a classic kind of leadership strategy that that avoids having to deal with the problem. If you want people to set homework and they're not setting homework regularly. Then you need to have those conversations with individuals not treat everyone like the worst ones if you like. We put the timetable to make sure everyone does actually say what the homeworks that regulate should be done within you know, within half a term there should be three, six week after three homeworks every other week. Okay, because you might want to kind of top you on the back end your homework there when they get close to the assessment in the two weeks leader. I want to give one that week, one one week and one the second week. So what kind of homework times have an arbitrary arbitrary homework timetable. It's kind of thrust upon you from a head of from a head of year that hasn't looked at isn't kind of involved in your own curriculum choices. Your schemes of learning maybe just makes no sense to me.

09:37

So one of the types of homework that says, Do you think there's any type of hammer you have set now or in the past? That is actually particularly bad for your wellbeing as a teacher?

09:53

T10

you know, I think he kind of emotionally and this is a bit of distance a bit kind of the the softer stuff if you like it. There is a few years ago, the kind of trend began this artist this idea of flipped learning. So kids flipped learning that required access to the Internet access to kind of research at home if you like. And although I think I've worked on a course that where somebody talks about and it was interesting, this idea of flipped learning and I could see the benefits of it. Again, like a lot of things in education, it didn't take into account a setting like as an as a kind of, as we kind of investigated and had more kind of in school staff training on this. This idea of flipped learning people being out there having to go home and look on the internet to find prior learning before lesson what what kind of reveal to me is this is just not all of our kids have and we scored in the pandemic have X access to the internet. And you

know, they may tell you they have access to the internet. The reality is very often that they don't or that the family is sharing one, one practical, you know, a device that can be used for homework between all of them. So, yeah, that kind of like flipped maybe even remote learning makes me sad because it makes me realise the inequity that there is in society and you can't run. You can't have a policy around how we set our that if it leaves out, you know, if there's one kid who can't access the homework, then there has to be another way of doing that isn't completely inclusive. That's my kind of strong belief. But yeah, just the fact that it kind of highlighted inequity in society that people have come up with this idea based on probably the leafy suburban schools where Yeah, every every kid does have their own computer in their room. Interesting I was I was reading something recently about and this kind of links in with flipped learning. I don't know how it fits in with what you're interested in, but at any expectation of kids doing work on phones is extremely limited just in the practical sense of what you can do on your phone. But there was a study done recently that proved or suggested that the size of the screen you are reading from the correlation between the size of the screen and how deeply you understand the topic in effect, what you're saying is, the bigger the screen, the more you understand, the smaller the screen, the less comprehension you take from that. So if we do have any expectation that a kid kind of can do learning on their phone, we are literally limiting them in what in their understanding. So yeah, so other types of homework that might that kind of affect my wellbeing now? I don't think so. I'd have to kind of be given some examples, maybe but I treat it when treated with content. I just don't see it as a significant It's homework for me isn't a significant part of my teaching toolkit. You know, I do what I do in the classroom, and on the whole that is satisfactory, like I say, in case a tray or would like kids to be out on them reading that's the biggest thing that can do to make a difference and we kind of we started to kind of address that here and in key stage four, it's it's kind of split, it's simple revision and a might provide kind of guided revision resources, you know, in key stage four, certainly year 10 and 11. But again, it is only after they've got to a certain point that learning that it makes sense to do that.

13:27

And the flip side, are there any types of home and you've set that you think are good for your wellbeing was improved your wellbeing?

13:41

T10

I think any homework like I say we have you know, we've done bits of this in the past where we have kind of integrated homework into schemes of learning. And when yeah, like I say when you see the purpose, much of it when it fits in with what you're doing in the classroom, it kind of complemented I guess that does have a positive effect on on your wellbeing in as much as you feel you know, you felt like you're getting through stuff and getting through well. So yeah. Well integrate homework is maybe positives and well to wellbeing.

14:18

And what kind of types of homework Have you set then that's integrated and therefore you think is positive is like a typical task that you think is a good?

14:28

T10

So it's things like, if I know we're going to be reading at a particular article or a particular part of a story, given the kids that that part of the story is that they can go they can go away and do the reading at home and but not just kind of passively do the reading and you have a series of kind of comprehension questions that they can only answer if they've kind of read what they've what they've supposed to read properly. And what that means is when they come into the lesson, you don't have to spend in theory you don't have to spend the time doing that reading with the class but that but there there lies in I guess the problem of integrated homework, but if one kid doesn't do that, you know, how do they how are they catching up if everyone else at work, you know, more than likely half the class have done the homework half haven't? You've got to go back and repeat everything from people who've done it unless you are really creative and you have kind of two separate lessons going on in the room which just is not practical with many of our groups. I think in the past what we've tried to do is use homework. Use homework as a way of plugging those cultural capital gaps. So whether it be giving them homework related to kind of Greek mythology, for example, or kind of pseudo political stuff, to be yet to deepen their general understanding of the world around them which will help them access our curriculum at a deeper level. They've been relatively effective. But I mean, it's the age old problem, isn't it? You can't experiential learning is the most important particularly I think in terms of cultural capital gain. And I think that's the problem with homework that this doesn't happen so much in the school, but in certain schools or certain settings, home it becomes a bit of a kind of an albatross and a bit of a focus and a lot of attention maybe is given to homework. And I think that fine as long as everything else is working really well. For us. I will be upset if as a school we focus too much on homework rather than, you know, the things that are going to have a bigger impact on our kids learning. Like for example, experiential learning, getting out there, you know, that I can give a kid a, a text that, you know, is a description of a beautiful pastoral scene in the in the Lake District. But but that's not going to plump their cultural capital gap like taking them to party Mill Valley or taking them to the Lake District and having them stand on top of a big hill looking down a beautiful lake and seeing it for themselves. So I think that's the thing like yeah, homework it's, it's a it's not an important factor in teaching for to pass the somewhat test in many ways.

17:25

So next question. I think you've kind of already answered this in many ways, or experienced, I suppose. It's not that applicable to you. If you could change the homework policy, or the type of homework you give to change will be in charge the whole policy of the school department, what would you change? What would the hiring policy be for you?

17:51

T10

I think it fits in with just a fundamental principle that I have that teachers should be treated as professionals and professionals to make their own decisions that that I want the autonomy to be able to set homework as and when I see fit. And if a school doesn't feel like a particular member of staff is is meeting their expectations wherever they are, they should have conversation with those staff rather than kind of setting the policy. school policy should be in this regard should be quite simple. The expectation is that you teach and you teach well, and you you know, but we leave you to work out how you do that we know and yes, there needs to be some level of kind of accountability and, you know, management on a departmental level and then kind of a wider senior level but the homework should fit in with a general ideology that teachers know how to teach well, and know the ways that they will get kids to

learn, or they can help kids to learn in the best possible way. And homework fits within that, but I don't want to be told I won't be told when to set homework, how to set homework. I want the autonomy. I think you know, I don't know, you know, I don't know enough about it, but I suspect if we looked at Scandinavian countries, but if that's a 95 Scandinavian countries place Finland who, who rank permanently persistently highly in the PISA rankings. They don't believe in homework, they believe in extracurricular activities. And in fact, we're talking about wellbeing we're talking and this may be the crux of where I get to and I just thought recently, you may have heard me talk about this academic board a couple years ago. I would much rather replace homework we like to say experiential learning. So having a potentially well in Finland, what they do, they're gonna climb a tree they're gonna play football, they're gonna take part in you know, the equivalent of you know, Cubs or scouts or whatever. Not easy to do here, not the opportunities we have that would have here obviously thinned in wealthier countries, smaller population, etc. But I think about a model in a previous school where for one night a week we had were there compulsory compulsory in inverted commas compulsory Extra, extra curricular night and everybody in Key Stage Three year nine included, had stay back and they and they took part in an extracurricular activity. And I was responsible for kind of designing it and staffing it and so members of staff kind of thought, you know, kind of contributed towards these activities by kind of, you know, introducing kids to their hobbies. So we'd ask maybe a group doing, you know, war, Warhammer or whatever it is. You might have a particular member of staff who is particularly keen on golf and they don't You don't want the backpack in the backfield, kind of swinging golf clubs around but it meant that we had to spend a bit of money and get kind of external agency in for an hour every week. We have fencing, we took kids up to Edgbaston reservoir to learn how to sail and that led to us taking three or four successive summers taking 20 Year 10 kids in the summer to the west coast of Scotland and we were just starting to see locks for five days kind of, again, taking some of them the most deprived some of the most kind of challenging kids in our school. It's in the west coast of Scotland. London likes to sail around to sail around down in the sky. And it's that kind of thing that led to the eyes. To run a movie club where you know, we watched the first robots we've watched no modern movies, and I'd have kids, porcine and Buster Keaton movies and falling around laughing and watching Three Stooges, watching you know, Japanese kind of animated movies, things that wouldn't normally watch again, developing a culture capital so get rid of this kind of stale old idea of here's a worksheet we're going to go and learn these quotes and actually invest in things that are going to help the mental the mental health and the wellbeing of children help them to socialise with each other, expand their horizons develop their cultural capital, but do through experiences to build a relationship with stuff in the school. I'll tell you what, we had one kid who, who he went and did the sailing and this kind of this period six things that we did. Edgbaston reservoir was really good on a little dinghy. We took him sailing to the west coast of Scotland. And he and the skipper hit it off loads run these like 60 foot yachts and sailing yachts and he was just brilliant. You know, he learned how to do the more than knots really quickly could kind of get get sales and sales down. And after the week, this has allowed for him real in the city, Birmingham from the heart, family background and the scope was so impressive him that they kept in contact through the head teacher at the school. He was a keen sailor, and they ended up having MacArthur everyone around the world like me and her get a signed copy of the book and he he was the youngest person to crew about from like, I think it's from like from Britain to the Azores and back or something like that. And this wasn't you know, this isn't, well, this is this this was in the middle of kind of keeping balsall Heath in in Birmingham. You know, we never would have had that experience without stuff like that. And for him that was worth more than any homework or any. In fact, probably mostly experiences in school. So that's my answer to

homework for wellbeing. Experiential learning, just you know, getting out there and doing stuff having this clip just completely rethink the way that you want kids to, to engage outside of the classroom.

23:32

Interesting. So I'm just thinking what would you think about a lot of schools out there that have a no homework policy then? What would your view on a no homework policy?

23:50

T10

Again, it depends on the the the thinking behind it, I don't like I mean, I'm a surly bugger, and I don't want to be told what to do. If I think that that is something if I think that giving someone something to do at home is going to be useful to them. I want to be able to do that. I can see the logic of it, you know that. We are going to do what we do in lesson because we're good enough to do what we do. In the time that we have. We don't need homework that makes sense to me. I think I'll go back to what we're just saying. By all means have a no homework policy, but you know, everything else, or lots of other stuff have you have to have your ducks in a row in other places know where your weaknesses are and how you're going to kind of plug those those problems. So, ultimately, I don't know I've been told what to do and how to teach. But I will probably agree that I think that a no homework policy is probably not a bad thing. I would suspect that I've heard about policies is they're not for staff. It's for it's just a flag to parents. We are an over work school. And again that goes back to this whole idea of parental choice. And this was a political thing that got brought in, kind of in the early 90s Wasn't decided, you know, people would have a choice in or a say in certain aspects of their lives. And I think that's been kind of detrimental. And it's what led to eventually the kind of the idea of that. That whole ideology when Michael Gove said I think we've had enough of hearing from experts. With the best will in the world. My daughter's teachers know how to teach her better than I do because they're the professionals in that setting. And in that particular school in the same way that I am with my kids. So yes, kind of agreement, no homework policy. But ultimately I just want teachers to get out to teach in the way that they see. They see fit, and let them be judged by their by their by their immediate peers, not by Ofsted. But by by but the people who know them and kind of work around them. We hold each other to hold each other to account internally not as a way of devolving any kind of accountability but just so it's not threatening so it doesn't destroy live, destroy careers unnecessarily. It's supportive and helpful and leads to better teaching. And anyone that says it doesn't work like that, again, I refer to Scandinavian countries where they have no Ofsted they have no kind of external scrutiny on those people that won't work around you. So no homework policy yet fine. Don't mind. But really don't tell me what to do.

26:29

Okay. And then last one, if you didn't have to spend time marking homework or setting home or anything like that, what would you the free time then gained?

26:41




T10




Plan better lessons plan better walk out with comprehensive letters. I don't want to work as a rule anyway. Okay, unless it's something particular that I think needs marketing. I don't spend any time worrying about setting homework. And I think I've said that I think if, if I if I

was ever in a position to affect any change in whatever school I was working in around homework and around kind of additional experiences, I would be looking to introduce the model that I explained to them, rather than getting to the homework to do stuff gets get out there and experienced about Okay, well that's like I say meaning book playing chess and knitting, fencing, as we know so far in fencing like the garden, garden gardening, gardening club, what are the essentials things that will always cool but getting out and doing stuff that really, really kind of develops, pushes that back pushes that pushing people that push kids out of the comfort zone a bit builds relationships with adults, important adults, but then develops our cultural capital. That's when a time can be better spent for everyone.




27:56

Thank you very much.

15:10   


  

T10 Interview

 Thu, 29/06/2023 · 13:53  28:00  Matthew John

Summary **Transcript** **AI Chat** **Comments**

So that's recording. I'll put that. So first question is, how does homework affect well being in your view?

 0:12

When you talk about well being you're talking about well being with pupils or staff,






1 **Speaker 1** 0:16

it's gonna be stuff first pupil staff parents

2 **Speaker 2** 0:19

think of the considerations maybe I don't know, staff. Very much depends on the expectation of the organisation. You're working within Disney. I think that kind of fundamentallv the principle that I work

0:25 / 27:59 1.5x

10.9 APPENDIX 9 – EXAMPLE OF NVIVO CODING OF TRANSCRIPTS

CODE STRIPES

- Revision
- Sports
- Exam questions
- Electrical devices
- Preparation homework
- Read
- Keep the same HWK
- Revision
- HWK takes a lot of time
- Preperation HWK
- Change HWK
- Not enough time to complete HWK
- Social Media
- Socialising
- Pointless
- Lack of teacher understanding
- Feedback
- Revision
- Gain knowledge
- Sleep loss
- Punishments and sanctions
- Progress and grad
- Mood
- Too much time
- Stress

Coding Density

S8Y12:

05:03

Yeah, the type that when you learn something in class and they give you something related to it, it will kind of when you go home it won't make you forget about it. It'll make you like, like oh stay in your brain. Like psychologically

Researcher 1 05:16

Can you think of any examples?

S8Y12:

05:18

Like retrieval, like remembering stuff like you know the miss the miss the word you know mean? Like yeah, like the dot dot dots and you put in the word that's missing those help. And also like going to going and also past paper questions when they are, like six marks, four markers, two markers, those help as well.

Researcher 1 05:39

So you like doing exam questions, but the key thing now is what you're saying is they've got to be shorter?

S8Y12:

05:44

Yeah, because teachers that they particularly base the exam style questions on the higher one and then we just forget about the other ones. So when you do that one first it makes you feel like confident and then you can move on to the high end.

time yourself independently, and even look at the marks on the laptop. How does that affect your well being and how you're feeling?

12:18

S11Y12:

Because if that if I see a question a little bogged down, not confident about and if if one of these questions come up in the test, and obviously I feel like more or less confident about the result I'm gonna get rid of these booklets, you can just go through the booklet, and in any topics that you don't feel happy about, you can do it and that will make you feel more confident going into the test because you know that you've practised on your weak areas.

Researcher 1 12:45

Okay, good. Next question. So if you could change the homework policy or the type How would you guess? What would you change?

12:57

S10Y12:

Say, restrict from homework from stacking up, I guess, because there's like, in, for example, in health and social care. You could get multiple different homeworks for example, you could get maybe one coursework kind of one exam type question and a one I feel like you should prohibit only one type of homework for each lesson each time because I feel like once it starts stacking, it ruins time management requires there's obviously outside factors and outside lives, and everyone does something different. So for example, if I'm doing football or extracurricular activity, then I wouldn't have as much time to do as someone who just go straight homeless does it and then that can mess up your

CODE STRIPES

Coding Density

- Working with peers
- Progress and grades
- Lack of teacher understanding
- Extended Writing pieces
- Pointless
- Apps and websites
 - Gain knowledge
- Change HWK
 - Positive image and esteem
- Coursework
- Mood
- Stress
- Revision

- Preperation homework

- No time for extra curricular
- Not enough time to complete HWK
- HWK takes a lot of time

- Sleep loss
- Too much time

10.10 APPENDIX 10 – EXAMPLE OF NVIVO CODING TREE

