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MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS
EFFECTIVE AT INCREASING STUDENT HOMEWORK COMPLETION

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory research study with a phenomenological research design was to gain an understanding of the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments, as perceived by middle school teachers, most effectively resulted in students submitting completed assignments. This study fills a gap and helps explain which homework assignments are more effective at increasing homework assignment completion for middle school students. The constructivist theory guided the conceptual framework. Data analysis was conducted on data collected through surveys, in-depth interviews with middle school teachers, and a review of archival homework samples. Through this phenomenological study four themes emerged regarding teacher perceptions of which homework assignments are more effective: routine homework, homework with clear expectations, homework that students see as achievable, and homework assignments that considered the executive functioning of students. It was found that middle school teachers' perceptions about increasing student homework assignment completion reflect the value of structural supports, ongoing homework development, and the assignment of the homework itself. Persons in educational administrative leadership, middle school teachers, and teachers in general may find this study useful.

Keywords: executive functioning, homework completion, homework assignments, middle school, rigor, teacher perceptions

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Homework can be a challenge for many students throughout the United States and many teachers find the lack of homework completion by students to be a concern (Buijs & Admiraal, 2012; Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006; Valle, Regueiro, Núñez, Rodríguez, Piñeiro, & Rosário, 2016). Studies have shown some students are resistant to completing homework because of assignment difficulties, time issues, lack of understanding directions, and executive functioning. meaning the way an individual uses mental skills including working memory, flexible thinking, and self-control to learn, work, and manage daily life (The Understood Team, 2020) among other factors. However, the focus of this study is not on the student or the difficulties they encounter, but rather on the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion as perceived by middle school teachers. It has been noted there is a gap in research that addresses, from the teachers' perspective, which homework assignments these are. While identifying the role of homework in public education in the United States is beyond the scope of this study, accepting the Oxford Learners Dictionary definition of homework as, "work that is given by teachers for students to do at home" or "work that somebody does to prepare for something" (2019, para. 1) and moving forward from there is a reliable starting place to begin this study.

Parents and teachers have concerns when students do not complete homework (Hayward, 2010). Parents may feel overwhelmed when trying to help students with homework which may lead to confrontations with a child who is resistant to doing homework or create struggles for the parent trying to balance other needs of the family (Núñez, Suárez, Rosário, Vallejo, Valle, & Epstein, 2015; Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, Whetsel, & Green, 2004). Teachers across content

and grade levels have expressed concern that without homework completion, some students will be disadvantaged and different rates of completion create a lack of equity in learning and preparedness in the classroom (McGlynn & Kelly, 2019). There is research in support of homework ranging along a spectrum of daily homework through no homework for various grades (Hallatt, Huss, Unsbee, Al-Bataineh, & Chumpavan, 2017; Vatterott, 2018). Much of the research has shifted over the years from what amount of homework is appropriate at different grade levels to what the very reason for homework is or should be (Vatterott, 2018). Studies have been done on assigning homework and types of assignments, but no research was identified regarding the phenomenon of the types of homework assignments, according to middle school teacher's perspectives, contribute to increasing students' rate of homework completion.

Homework has been a focus of research and questioning almost since the inception of public learning institutions or communities (Hallatt, et al., 2017). The stated purpose of homework has varied from developing organizational skills, critical thinking skills, time management, reduction of test anxiety, and persistence (Bembenutty, 2011). Work by Bembenutty (2011) has revealed benefits for students who completed homework as well as the need for meaningful homework. As demonstrated by Hargis, Patti, Maheady, Budin, & Rafferty, "Many students fail to complete homework, while others do so with low accuracy" (2017, p. 172). This range of completion or lack of completion by students can create disparities and inequalities among students within the classroom and affect the ability of students to collaborate and communicate regarding content. With the spectrum of student attentiveness to homework and differences in available at-home support, investigating middle school teachers' perceptions regarding what contributes toward getting students to increase homework completion can offer

insight into which homework assignments from middle school teachers' perspectives are more effective at increasing student homework assignment completion.

Research has shown teachers' concerns about classroom instruction, including the increasing demands on teachers, student apathy, and lack of parental support, among other issues (Chang, 2013; Shen, McCaughtry, Martin, Garn, Kulik, & Fahlman, 2015). This research does not include how teacher perceptions can offer insight into the realities of how one might increase homework completion by students. A problem in many classrooms in many public schools across the United States is students not completing assigned homework and often seeming unmotivated and disengaged (Bennett, 2017; Cooper et al., 2006; Desrochers, 2018; Dews, 2016). Lack of homework completion may lead to disparities in abilities among students, learning inequalities, and the ability for a class or lesson to be presented as smoothly as possible when some students come unprepared (Hayward, 2010). If only some students complete homework then proper peer work may be affected, quality academic conversations among students can be impaired, and teachers may need to take time to ensure all students are ready for the next sequence in a lesson (Goldberg, 2007).

There are studies that have investigated the reasons why students do not complete homework related to time and scheduling, how to improve homework accuracy through the use of peer support, and changes in schedules for students to receive 1:1 teacher assistance, and what motivates high school or higher education students to do homework based mainly on feedback and goal setting related to college and career plans (Bembenutty, 2011; Bennett, 2017; Hinchey, 1996; Katz, Eilot, & Nevo, 2013; Núñez et al., 2015). The middle school teachers' perceptions of what homework students are more likely to complete may help inform educators of what may prove useful in the current pedagogical era for middle school teacher planning. The problem of

homework incompleteness can be dire; “just two or three zeros are sufficient to cause failure for an entire semester, and just a few course failures can lead a student to drop out of high school, incurring a lifetime of personal and social consequences” (Reeves, 2004, p. 325). An outcome of using information about middle school teachers’ perceptions of what homework students complete may lead to improved lesson planning which may deter a cycle of homework incompleteness, gaps in learning, resentment, feelings of failure, and inability to participate in future lessons by middle school students (Wilson & Rhodes, 2010). This study’s findings may help middle school teachers focus lessons using homework assignments found, through expressed teacher perceptions, to be more effective at increasing student homework assignment completion. Potentially, not all approaches will work with all students, so discerning the range of teacher perceived homework assignments leading toward increased student homework completion should be investigated through this study and shared with others in middle school education.

Statement of the Problem

This study seeks to explore the phenomenon of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion as perceived by middle school teachers. While there is research on middle school students connected to homework completion and connections to academic success, there is little research on middle school teachers’ perceptions regarding the phenomenon of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students’ homework assignment completion. With teachers reporting that many students do not consistently complete and turn in homework (DeSimone, 2018; Ferlazzo, 2013), examining the phenomenon regarding homework that middle school teachers perceive as effective at getting students to increase homework completion could help to reduce student homework incompleteness.

problems and benefit many stakeholders including parents, students, teachers, administrators, and the community (Walker, et al., 2004; Xu, 2013).

Previous studies have looked at a variety of areas regarding homework, including appropriate amounts of homework, how to set up suitable homework stations, and homework with special populations; middle school studies related to teacher perceptions are less available (Bembenutty, 2011; Bennett, 2017; Cooper et al., 2006; Eren & Henderson, 2011; Hallatt et al., 2017; Kralovec, 2007; Núñez et al., 2015). Studies related to middle school students and homework revealed connections between attendance and academics, the effects of digital versus traditional paper and pencil homework behavior, and effort with school work which are all significant to students' academic success but little about the middle school teachers' perceptions regarding the phenomenon of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion (Balfanz, Herzog, & Iver 2007; Hallatt et al., 2017). Further studies showed ways to help students with homework such as arranging the homework environment, helping with time management, and offering homework help and support (Balfanz, et al., 2007; Bembenutty, 2011; Bryan, & Burstein, 2004; Daniels, 2011; Katz, Kaplan, & Gueta, 2009; Xu, 2013), which are all beneficial interventions for home.

In summary, this study seeks to explore the phenomenon of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion as perceived by middle school teachers. Often, teachers assign classwork and homework but are not asked by administrators or given opportunities to share their impressions regarding what contributes to an increase in student homework completion with their professional peers. Researchers have studied what teachers perceive engages students in assignments (Bennett, 2017; DeSimone, 2018; Wilson & Rhodes, 2010), and what middle school students perceive as most interesting

(Hallatt, et al., 2017; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). The findings from this study will uncover which homework assignments, as perceived by middle school teachers, most effectively result in students submitting completed assignments. Results from this study will bring a voice to the teachers to communicate their perceptions and observations to others in middle school education regarding middle school teachers' perceptions of the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion.

Purpose of the Study

This study examines the phenomenon that some homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion than others. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments, as perceived by middle school teachers, most effectively result in students submitting completed assignments. This study seeks to explore the phenomenon of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion as perceived by middle school teachers. Data collection will result in information from middle school teachers about their perceptions related to which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion.

Research Question

The single focused research question for this study was developed to address a phenomenon that some homework assignments are more effective in eliciting students to more often complete homework, and to identify what those assignments are. The research question also aligns with the problem and purpose statements. The following research question will guide this study:

- Which homework assignments, per middle school teachers' perspectives, are most effective at increasing student homework assignment completion?

Conceptual Framework

The development of this study's conceptual framework follows the tenets of Ravitch and Riggan (2017), including the researcher's interest, topical research, and the theoretical framework explained in Chapter 2 within the literature review. The conceptual framework that drives this study's methodology is based upon Constructivist Theory (Daniels, 2011; Gupta, 2017; McSparron, Vanka, & Smith, 2018) and focuses on which homework assignments from middle school teachers' perspectives are more effective at increasing student homework assignment completion. This conceptual framework is a tool that informs the direction of the study regarding middle school teachers' perceptions concerning which assignments contribute to students increased homework completion as homework incompleteness by students is a concern for many teachers and other stakeholders in the United States (Bembenutty, 2011; Bennett, 2017).

Teachers are generally the individuals who create homework assignments, so learning what middle school teachers perceive contributes to increased homework completion can lead to more effective homework. Educators from different subjects and grade levels acknowledge that involving students in work completion, including homework, is often essential to academic success (Hayward, 2010). According to Hayward (2010), students must have a reason for completing the work, "when students are assigned a homework assignment, they make a choice to complete that assignment based on whether they feel it is important to them" (p. 57). "Many students 'will not work to learn' unless they see how lessons can help them with their short- or long- term goals" (Ferlazzo, 2013, p. 6). Learning how to get students to work can be a genuine benefit to students as research shows when students do not complete their homework, they do not

do as well on their assessments (Hayward, 2010). While motivators behind students' completion of homework assignments is not the focus of this study, it has been previously studied (Letterman, 2013; Boser, Benner, & Smithson, 2019).

The reason a student chooses to complete a homework assignment may be intrinsic or extrinsic (Wilson & Rhodes, 2010). The cause may be extrinsic if it is done solely for the reward of grades or to avoid the punishment of poor grades or admonitions; the reason could be intrinsic if the student completes the work for the satisfaction, curiosity, or pleasure gained from completing the task (Katz et al., 2009). When students choose not to complete homework, the classroom environment will be much different and can create a cycle of disengagement for individual students (

Figure 1) as well as a lack of interaction and engagement with student peers, which can impact all students in the classroom. The rationale for completion, either internal or external, is critical for encouraging students to engage with homework and work toward completion.

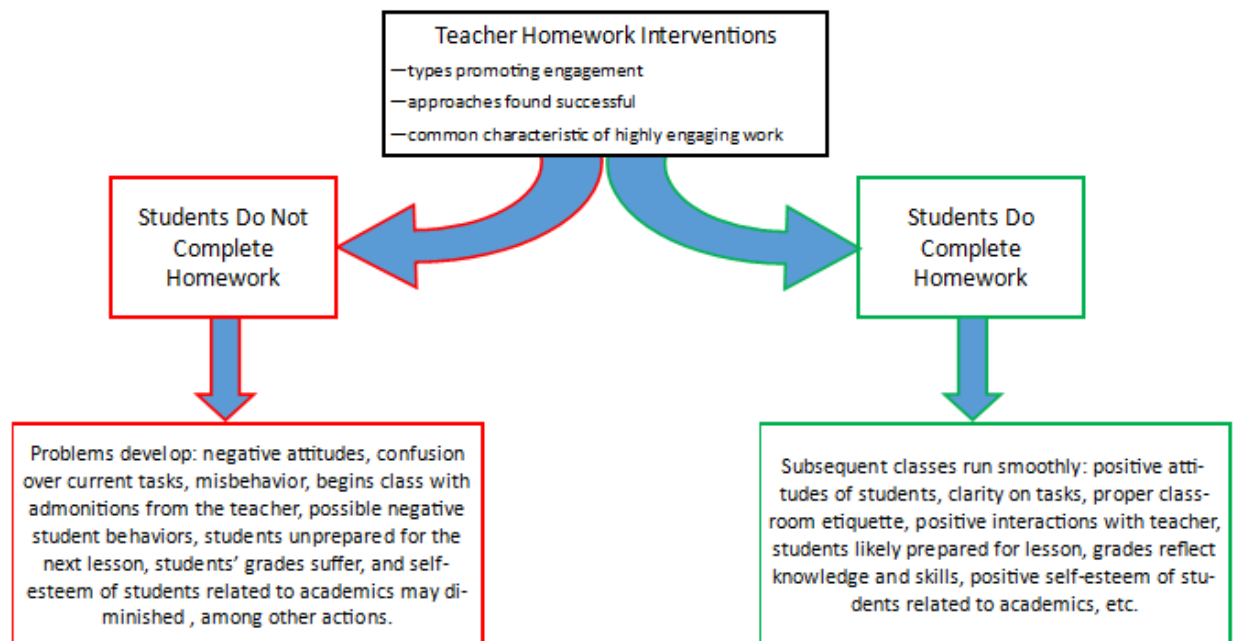


Figure 1 Conceptual framework of teacher interventions

To properly frame this study, this conceptual framework recognizes there are students along a spectrum of abilities, and with different advantages that teachers must consider when helping students find success with homework completion. Professional educators were interviewed and surveyed, and individual homework assignments were reviewed, to develop insights into what middle school teachers perceive promotes increased student homework completion as a means of conducting this phenomenological research. Constructivist theory, a learning theory, states that “learning is an active, contextualized process of constructing knowledge rather than acquiring it. Knowledge is constructed based on personal experiences and hypotheses of the environment” (Learning Theories, 2016, para. 2). If learners are to be successful, according to the Constructivist Theory, a student must be active, engaged, and involved, as a desire to engage is a crucial component to learning within the Constructivist Theory (Hein, 1991).

Learning about the homework assignments from middle school teachers’ perspectives that are more effective at increasing student homework assignment completion may fill a gap in research that needs to be addressed from the teachers’ perspectives. The conceptual framework, for this study, built on Constructivist Theory (Learning Theories, 2016) shows how teachers’ perceptions regarding homework completion can be drawn from information derived from surveys, semi-structured narrative interviews, and a review of homework assignments to help guide middle school teachers in planning more effective homework assignments.

Constructivist Theory, which requires active participation by students (Hein, 1991), can be used along with middle school teacher perceptions regarding homework to discern what assignments students will more likely complete. Constructivist Theory suggests that as middle school teachers’ perceptions related to the phenomenon of which homework assignments are

more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion can be discerned, then students will more likely be active participants in their learning (Learning Theories, 2016) inside and outside the classroom. Those findings can be communicated with others to strive to explore the phenomenon of which homework assignments from middle school teachers' perspectives are more effective at increasing student homework assignment completion.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

There are assumptions about any study accepted as accurate but not verified or verifiable (Creswell, 2015). In this study, the truthfulness and accuracy in reporting by teachers are assumed, and the transferability of conclusions to apply to other students or schools in other communities is a limitation based on demographic similarities. The scope identifies the boundaries of this study (Creswell, 2015): (a) specifically, confining the study to one middle school and teachers from that school, (b) perceptions from middle school teachers regarding what homework assignments are more successful in getting students to improve homework completion, and (c) as reported by teachers through surveys and interviews and further substantiated by teacher-supplied archival homework data samples of actual homework assignments with rates of completion and other information teachers select to share regarding the homework samples. The major limitations are (a) the size of the study, only one middle school, (b) the use of convenience sampling of teachers, and (c) how data collection from teachers voluntarily may cause errors in research data if some subgroups, such as a single grade level, have low levels of participation in the surveys, interviews, and sharing of archival homework data samples.

Assumptions

This study engaged middle school teachers from a single middle school through convenience sampling. It is assumed participants will be honest and truthful to the best of their abilities about their reporting of specific data provided and that narrative information will be accurate as well. There was a prior affiliation with the researcher, who worked in the same building for up to six years. It cannot be assured that participants will not respond in ways they presume the researcher may want them to respond. With such limited contact among these teachers over the years working in different wings of the building, across grade levels, and on different teaching teams, however, close affiliation and regular contact was not developed among most of the teachers. Another assumption is that homework is an essential element in the education of students in this middle school due to the prevalence of homework assigned and policies related to homework at the district and school level, although the essentiality of homework is noted and debated in various research articles. It is further assumed that the perceptions of what succeeds in getting students to complete homework will have common elements that are identifiable or that the recognizable elements have commonalities; this may be partially correct, or no commonalities may be identified. A final assumption will relate to what is considered a low, medium, or high rate of homework completion. Work by Vanbuskirk (2008) showed a 35% incompleteness rate for homework in a high school. Langberg et al. (2016) found that a baseline of 87.9% homework submission was a high baseline rate as reported by teachers but was 12% lower for students with ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). Hallatt et al. (2017) showed a mean of 81.3% and 72.2% for work completion across two different classes over a period of nine weeks for students in grades six and seven. Within this small sample from the literature shows that typical submission rates fall between 65% and 81%

with 87.9% being referred to as a high rate of return. For the purpose of this study an average rate of homework return will be considered to fall between 65-85%.

Limitations

Limitations are those events or instances causing problems with a research study but allow the research to continue once acknowledged if those instances do not result in unusable or unreliable data, such as contradictory or incomplete data (Creswell, 2015). The study took place in Massachusetts and used a convenience sampling approach. “Massachusetts is the top state for education” (Ziegler, 2019, para. 1), meaning the presumption that student habits and skills being investigated will translate to other states equally is unclear. This study may help educators in schools within Massachusetts or other states with similar characteristics listed in Chapter 3 to draw comparisons. Traditional middle schools include grades 6-8, but not all middle schools align with this configuration (Wormeli, 2016), so a potential limitation may occur when comparing varied grade levels from that of the convenience sample school. Another limitation includes the limited number of participants, thereby potentially affecting the amounts of data collected from each grade level. Participants were selected as a convenience sample due to the established relationship of the researcher with the site district school, potential participant pool, and ease of access. Teachers who participated may over- or underestimate their students’ performance on surveys or within the semi-structured narrative interview questions if they did not confirm or check their reported data. The researcher reviewed presented archival homework data and assessed the words or phrases used by teachers to describe the perceived reasoning for the rates of return by students. This review looked for trends in the archival homework data seeking similarities in assignments with high or low rates of return. This information may help shed light on the assignments with high or low rates of submission. The variation in the amount

of homework assigned by middle school teachers and the weighting of homework, which was expected across grade levels and among various subject areas, can also limit transferability if one teacher assigns significantly more or less homework than other study participants. A further limitation could be the short-term nature of the study.

Personal interest. Student homework completion varies along a continuum from complete disengagement to thoughtful attention by those who complete all assignments (Schrader, 2016). The range of completion by students can create an opportunity gap or learning gap between the students within a classroom, potentially creating inequalities between individuals as well as affecting the ability for students to interact, engage, communicate, and collaborate with one another (Xu, 2013). Students have anecdotally been observed by this researcher over a 25-year career as eagerly involved with work, using rubrics, and meeting with teachers before due dates for assignments to seek assistance and support. The researcher has observed that students who eagerly seek help and show an active desire to complete work tend to find academic success. In contrast, other students at the opposite end of the continuum will turn in nothing or perhaps blank paper resulting in poorer academic performance. As a veteran teacher in the classroom, the researcher has noted learning gaps that exist and may create an impediment to current and future academic success for some students. This researcher sought to explore the phenomenon of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion as perceived by middle school teachers. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments, as perceived by middle school teachers, most effectively result in students submitting completed assignments.

A plan of action to identify and utilize effective homework does not always lead to student academic success. Academic enticement with homework may help bridge the learning and performance gap making the journey toward higher achievement easier or assist students in performing at higher levels than before (Hinchey, 1996; Vatterott, 2010). Students can have other means to find academic success than through high rates of homework completion, but this researcher believes increasing homework completion can only be a benefit for student learning and achievement.

Scope

The limited scope of this study includes one middle school selected for convenience sampling in this phenomenological research. The scope is limited by time constraints to a portion of the 2019-2020 school year for survey data, data from interviews, and the inclusion of archival homework data including representative samples of homework assigned with completion rates and key descriptions of why these assignments had high or low rates of submission provided by teachers. The study focused on middle school teachers' perceptions regarding what types of homework contributed toward getting students to complete and submit homework. Extraneous reasons students avoid or submit incomplete homework were noted but are not the focus of this study. The scope consisted of data from middle school teachers about students in regular education and special education in inclusion settings as well as students who are English language learners. Data collected from teachers did not delineate between these student subgroups, and all data from each teacher were examined collectively as well as in a separate dataset.

Rationale and Significance

The justification for this study is to identify the middle school teachers' perceptions of what homework assignments contribute toward getting students to increase homework completion. This researcher believes that findings from this research will assist middle school teachers in supporting students in preparing for classes and be better engaged with the content and peers. This research is significant as it has the potential to help teachers create more engaged students, higher-achieving students, and more success overall for all students in the classroom if rates of homework completion can be increased.

Researching the middle school teachers' perceptions of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion that are used in middle school may begin to uncover information to guide teachers in lesson planning. Analyzing middle school teachers' perceptions related to the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion could benefit students who struggle with homework by providing and assigning homework that has a higher likelihood of completion. As more students complete assigned homework, other students in the class may be better able to participate and communicate with their peers. By minimizing homework incompleteness, this researcher believes the students' ability to enter the next class set up for success can only improve. Identifying homework more likely to result in completion as it relates to middle school assignments may enhance the learning environment for all middle school students in this middle school and potentially elsewhere as well.

Rationale

Getting all students to consistently complete homework continues to be a problem at multiple levels of K-12 public education across all subject areas in the United States

(Bembenutty, 2011; Bennett, 2017); learning about middle school teachers' perceptions of what homework assignments can result in getting students to increase homework completion, which is critical in helping students find success in the classroom and beyond. This study is needed as it addresses the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments from middle school teachers' perspectives are more effective at increasing student homework assignment completion. Hallatt et al. (2017) found that what students perceive about an assignment likely influences a student's completion of homework but not what teachers perceive. This study's findings can then be shared with other middle school teachers for use in practical ways within classrooms. Utilizing the results of this research in the appropriate grade level and across content areas may increase student interest, grades, and self-esteem, among other characteristics such as reducing admonitions from the teacher, lack of preparedness for future classes, failing grades, and a learning gap between peers (Reeves, 2004). This research also fills a gap in the literature explicitly related to middle school teachers' perceptions of what succeeds in getting students to increase homework completion.

Significance

This study is significant to administrators, middle school teachers, students, parents, and community members who support schools through tax funding. This study shows how middle school teachers' perceptions of what influences students to increase homework completion may require different expectations at different grade levels among the various content area disciplines or even differing expectations among students. There is much research about homework for high school or higher education students but much less regarding middle school students and even less about middle school teacher perceptions regarding what is effective in getting students to increase homework completion (Vatterott, 2018; Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Xu, 2013). If there

appear to be clear indications during this study regarding middle school teacher perceptions positively promoting increased student homework completion leading to student learning, then identifying what contributes to the increased completion and sharing this information with other educational professionals should follow, as stated by Eren and Henderson (2011). The study may provide middle school teachers with useful information to help develop plans for increased student homework completion. This study is important because students who do not complete homework may begin a negative cycle of events, including admonitions from teachers, lack of preparedness, potentially failing grades, and a delta between those who complete homework and those who do not (Reeves, 2004). If teachers can find what contributes to all, or more, students increasing homework completion and submission, then this study may help increase knowledge and skills among students, and the divergence in success between students who complete homework and those who do not (Tai, 2018) may lessen.

The lack of homework completion may begin a process of additional problems for students that builds and results in a cascade of other issues in the classroom for individual students, other students in the class, and the teacher (Schiefele & Schaffner, 2015). When students do not complete assigned homework, other problems may develop, including a gap in knowledge between students who do and those who do not complete the work (McGlynn & Kelly, 2019). Additionally, students may begin class with an admonition from the teacher, and frequently negative behaviors follow as a result compounding the problems students face with academics (Tai, 2018). Gaps in learning could lead to difficulties with being prepared for the next lesson, students' grades suffer, and the self-esteem of students related to academic ability appears diminished (Reeves, 2004). Unprepared students often distract other students creating an environment that is less conducive to overall learning for all students (Culver, 2015).

In general, missing homework reduces academic success and is a problem as evaluated within different schools at various levels of the educational system across the United States, as shown in Research Spotlight (n.d.) and Dews (2016). The *National Education Association Today* magazine reported homework incompleteness as a concern and began looking to incentivize students toward increased homework completion, as noted by Yates (n.d.). By analyzing middle school teachers' perceptions related to the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion in this single middle school across grade levels and analyzing completion and rates of submission, this researcher's study provides information for other middle school teachers regarding what teachers see that contributes to increased student homework completion within the middle school classroom. These findings may require different expectations at different grade levels, which would help fill a gap in the literature about middle school teachers' perceptions regarding homework observed to be effective at involving students. With many students failing to meet minimum standards on state-mandated testing, this research uncovered information that could lead to a learning shift related to student homework completion, which may lead to improved scores.

While any new findings or conclusions regarding middle school teacher perceptions and homework completion may not necessarily be transferable to all schools or students, researching ways to positively impact homework completion and increase student learning may specifically assist students at the site middle school or in middle schools with similar characteristics. Studying the middle school teacher perceptions that appear to contribute to homework completion can provide information to middle school teachers about those students reluctant to complete homework and may benefit students who struggle with homework completion and improve their ability to enter the next class set up for success (Tai, 2018). Discovering how to

best approach this lack of homework completion can enhance the learning environment for all students within the classroom. If middle school teacher perceptions regarding what is successful in getting middle school students to increase homework completion are encouraged by administrative leadership in either a democratic or participatory way, this could help change the culture of student homework completion and potentially lead to increased learning and higher student homework completion and potentially other schoolwork as well (Culver, 2015).

Definition of Terms

Research often requires a particular set of phrases and vocabulary terms used with regularity (Creswell, 2015). The most common terms are listed here to ensure the researcher and the audience have a common understanding of these phrases and vocabulary terms. These phrases and vocabulary terms seek to describe aspects of education regarding homework, student work and habits, and educational practices.

Best Practices: “Classroom instructional strategies that have been demonstrated and accepted by the professional community to improve student learning” (Office of the Education Ombudsman, 2011, p. 11).

Constructivism: “A learning theory that states that students learn by creating their own knowledge. Also known as Discovery Learning” (Office of the Education Ombudsman, 2011, p. 13).

Differentiated Instruction: “An instructional technique that includes various ways to teach content and assess learning. It is used to meet student needs and differences in readiness, interests, and learning styles” (Office of the Education Ombudsman, 2011, p. 14).

Executive Function: “The cognitive process that encompasses an individual's ability to organize thoughts and activities, prioritize tasks, manage time efficiently, and make decisions” (Executive Function, 2009, para. 1).

Executive Functioning: “...a set of mental skills that include working memory, flexible thinking, and self-control. We use these skills every day to learn, work, and manage daily life. Trouble with executive function can make it hard to focus, follow directions, and handle emotions, among other things” (The Understood Team, 2020, para. 1).

Extra-curricular activities: “Activities that are not part of the required curriculum and that take place outside of the regular course of study” (Office of the Education Ombudsman, 2011, p. 16).

Homework: “work that is given by teachers for students to do at home” or “work that somebody does to prepare for something” (Oxford Learners Dictionary, 2019, para. 1).

Homework Completion: “Homework completion... Homework was considered completed if it was delivered to the teacher on the day after it was assigned” (Hinton & Kern, 1999, p. 232).

Learning Gap: “...the gap between the student’s knowledge and understanding of a concept or process and where they need to be” (Harris, 2019, p. 2).

Middle School: “Schools for students in the early adolescent years, generally grade 6th through grade 8th” (Office of the Education Ombudsman, 2011, p. 21).

Objectives: “Measurable steps toward the achievement of a goal” (Office of the Education Ombudsman, 2011, p. 35).

Persistence: "...Persistence was demonstrated by observed behaviors such as sticking to an activity as expected for the child's age (or with only minor distractions), not seeking distraction when engaged, responding to problems only after having spent sufficient time analyzing them (i.e., lack of impulsivity), and not becoming aggressive or hostile when frustrated" (McDermott, Rikoon, & Fantuzzo, 2014, p. 201) or "continuation of effort and striving in the face of difficulty, opposition, or failure" (Charles A. Dana Center, n.d.).

Phenomenology: "direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced..." (Phenomenology, n.d., para. 1).

Proficiency: "...defined as scoring above the bottom quartile" (McDermott, Rikoon, & Fantuzzo, 2014, p. 202) or "the ability to do something at grade level" (Office of the Education Ombudsman, 2011, p. 23).

Response to Intervention (RTI): "...is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs" (Gorski, 2020, para. 1).

Rigor: "...instruction, schoolwork, learning experiences, and educational expectations that are academically, intellectually, and personally challenging" (Rigor, 2014, para. 1) or "...rigor in the classroom requires expectations and experiences that are academically, intellectually, and personally challenging" (Christenson, 2017, para. 1).

Scaffolding: "An instructional technique in which the teacher breaks a complex task into smaller tasks and supports students as they learn, and then gradually shifts responsibility for learning to the students" (Office of the Education Ombudsman, 2011, p. 24).

Student Engagement: "...the intensity with which students apply themselves to learning in school." (Loveless, 2016, para. 1).

Student Habits: how students "plan, monitor, and regulate their learning" (McMillan, 2010, p. 8)

Conclusion

Completion of assigned homework, meaning completion, attempts to complete, or efforts to gain assistance in completing the homework assignment, is an issue in schools across America (Hayward, 2010) as well as among middle school students. Broad standards for homework for schools exist and vary significantly across grade levels, subjects, and regions. The implementation of homework and homework practices vary considerably among teachers, teaching teams, departments, and grade levels. An analysis of middle school teachers' perceptions related to the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion for middle school students can help identify trends. Those trends may prove effective at involving students in increased homework completion and should suggest relevant information to guide further planning by middle school teachers. The study analyzed data from middle school teachers to look for trends in teacher perceptions regarding homework completion. Identifying which commonalities exist for those completed assignments may have positive impacts for teachers, students, administrators, parents, and other stakeholders.

An analysis of middle school teachers' perceptions of what homework assignments contribute to getting students to increase homework completion may help to bridge the learning gap by encouraging students to complete assigned homework, allow students to enter class prepared for the next lesson, increase student grades, increase student self-esteem related to

academics, begin class more positively with the teacher, and encourage more on-task behaviors (Xu, 2011). If these benefits are true for most middle school students, then finding what middle school teachers perceive increases homework completion may also lead to increases in student knowledge, capabilities, and readiness.

A review of the literature revealed key considerations regarding students and homework completion, most specifically related to high school and higher education. This study adds to the body of knowledge in that it seeks to include a focus on middle school teachers' perceptions of what is effective in getting students to increase homework completion. These findings may lead to greater academic success for students. With many students across the United States not making adequate yearly progress, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders need to evaluate instructional methods to help improve student success, participation, and learning.

Chapter 2, the literature review, includes information related to a comprehensive review of the available literature as of 2019. The literature review will explain the study topic and context within the middle school classroom. A further developed and presented conceptual framework will show how this study may help scholars gain an understanding of which homework assignments, as perceived by middle school teachers, most effectively result in students submitting completed assignments.

Chapter 3, the methodology, introduces the plans for the study based on the problem, purpose, and research question. The research design includes the site, de-identified data for discretion, and an overview description of the participants. The sampling method and samples of the instrumentation planned for use with explanations for each are included. The method of collecting and analyzing the data provides information about how the study was conducted. The methodology addresses efforts taken to increase the study's credibility with explanations of

utilizing member checking and how the study may be transferable to individual schools and have dependability and confirmability. Ethical considerations are discussed with an overall conclusion regarding the methodology undertaken. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, and chapter 5 presents the conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study sought to explore the phenomenon of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion as perceived by middle school teachers. The analysis of data collected resulted in identifying middle school teachers' perceptions related to the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments, as perceived by middle school teachers, most effectively result in students submitting completed assignments. The single focused research question for this study is noted as:

- Which homework assignments, per middle school teachers' perspectives, are most effective at increasing student homework assignment completion?

This literature review focuses upon the rationale for homework, types and amounts of homework assigned, expected outcomes for homework, reasons for student disengagement/lack of completion, home supports, and homework approaches proven effective in other areas of education as oftentimes middle school research is an area not explored in the literature. The literature review also shows how middle school teachers have not had a voice in this area.

Study Topic

This literature review explores the idea of middle school teachers' perceptions of what contributes toward getting students to increase homework completion with a review of past studies, current approaches, and a synthesis of the resultant findings. There is much research about homework for high school or higher education students but much less regarding middle school and homework, and there is no research that explicitly studied middle school teachers'

perceptions of student homework completion. The context will focus on middle school grade teachers but will include some information outside this grade range to show trends as well as the gaps in the literature which demonstrate the significance of this study. According to Marzano and Pickering (as cited in Carr, 2013, p. 171), “With only rare exceptions, the relationship between the amount of homework students complete and their achievement was found to be positive and statistically significant” so learning what middle school teachers’ perceptions of what is successful in getting students to increase homework completion may potentially affect achievement. This information informs fellow educators regarding the phenomenon that some homework assignments, from middle school teachers’ perspectives, are more effective at increasing student homework assignment completion.

Context. The context of this literature review focuses on the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students’ homework assignment completion across multiple levels of public education as perceived by middle school teachers. Researchers thus far have looked at teacher perceptions about some topics, but not regarding what succeeds at improving homework completion rates or necessarily what limits students interactions with homework at the middle school level. One insight within the literature has shown that “homework shouldn’t be about rote learning. The best kind deepens student understanding and builds essential skills” (Vatterott, 2010, para. 1). An analysis of middle school teacher perceptions of what contributes to student homework completion may lead to inferences of what influences students to complete the assigned homework. As Vatterott (2010) revealed, selecting appropriate homework is paramount and should have the following: a goal, be efficient, encourage student ownership, promote student competence, look important (as a means of enticing students to complete it). If there appear to be clear indicators teachers perceive that

work in increasing student academic completion and learning, then those homework assignment findings should be shared with middle school teachers and administrators; this sharing may lead to improved student learning, growth scores, and overall success, as stated by Eren and Henderson (2011).

Research articles were initially limited to 2008-2019 but excluded important information related to the site school chosen for convenience sampling, so adjustments were made to include relevant information pertaining specifically to the site of the study, to show trends in education over time, and draw from theoretical works. This adjustment required the use of documents before 2008 and included sources showing historical trends related to generalized homework perceptions in the United States over time and inclusion of information regarding the theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

Significance. Initial literature review findings show homework can be essential to increase student learning, achievement, engagement, and participation when used effectively (Bryan, & Burstein, 2004). Most researchers studied high school or higher education students and homework which left a gap in the literature for middle school students and teachers (Boser et al., 2019; Buijs, & Admiraal, 2012; Eren, & Henderson, 2008; Hallatt et al., 2017; Walker, 2019; Xu, 2011). Middle school teacher perceptions regarding effective homework assignments that increase student homework completion has not been investigated, creating a need for research this topic.

Schoolwork must be at an appropriate level, perhaps with modification for some students, and students must see connections between homework and positive academic outcomes (Holik, 2016). As Hayward (2010) maintained, “For students in high school, homework had the most influence on achievement level. For middle school or junior high students, the effect was half as

much, and for elementary students, there was little to no effect on achievement” (p. 13). While this presents information about middle school student homework, it does not speak to middle school teachers’ perceptions about what contributes to student homework completion specifically but does show there is a level of importance for middle school students to complete homework.

The literature analysis found significance in developing persistence in middle school students (Renaissance Learning, 2018). Persistence is defined as a “continuation of effort and striving in the face of difficulty, opposition, or failure” (Charles A. Dana Center, n.d.). Students tend to learn skills to organize, study, and manage their time in adolescence, which often carries through high school and work-life (Balfanz, et al., 2007). Identifying the middle school teachers’ perceptions of what contributes toward getting students to increase homework assignment completion may increase persistence by students.

There are contradictions in the research about the appropriate amount of homework for middle school students. What type and amount results in highest success and achievement is examined, but the overall weekly total appears to be a more valid indicator than a nightly total with an average of 1-2 hours nightly bringing greatest achievement (Hayward, 2010). “Many students lack the interest or motivation, content or procedural knowledge and/or organizational skills to complete homework independently and successfully” (Hargis et.al., 2017, p. 173). As Kralovec said, “There is a lack of research on the effects of different types of homework on student achievement” (2007, p. 4). Alfie Kohn (as cited in Crain, 2007) said in an interview,

If we are really serious about doing what is in the best interest of our children and of all children, then we have to set up classrooms and families and a culture that is about democratic, caring communities that support everyone rather than making sure that some kids have to triumph over their peers. (p. 20)

“Teachers need to assign homework that has a clear purpose and rationale and is meaningful” (Bembenutty, 2011, p. 453) and should enrich an “existing and well-planned curriculum, supports classroom instruction, connects to current or future lessons, encourages family participation, facilitates student contributions to the classroom communities, and generates excitement and genuine interest in learning” (Bembenutty, 2011, p. 453). Determining what middle school teachers perceive contributes to students completing homework at the middle school level is significant.

Problem Statement. This study explored the phenomenon of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion as perceived by middle school teachers. Ideally, all students would complete assigned schoolwork and homework, come prepared for the next class, and learn or reinforce the skills or concepts needed for future success. Homework serves as practice, preparation for future lessons, increases a student’s ability to participate, and improves personal development of student skills (Epstein, 2002) but when students do not complete schoolwork or homework a gap in learning often forms which may compound over time (Learning Gap, 2013). Understanding middle school teacher perceptions regarding what is effective in getting students to complete homework may assist students, teachers, and perhaps other stakeholders in avoiding the gap in learning. Middle school teachers could potentially use that information in the creation of lessons for schoolwork and homework that can set students up for increased learning, participation, and success in school.

Homework completion can lead to academic and non-academic benefits, while incompleteness of homework can potentially have negative results (Culver, 2015; Katz, et al., 2013; Learning Gap, 2013). Non-completion of homework can lead to “procrastination... associated with negative consequences such as tests and social anxiety, the use of inefficient

learning strategies, fear of failure, and even pathological conditions of depression and anxiety” (Katz, et al., 2013, p. 112). Students who complete homework have experienced a strong positive relationship between homework and achievement, as noted by Ramdass and Zimmerman (2011). While the International Activities Program study was not focused on middle school students, it found a point of diminishing returns in 2007, showing that Massachusetts students who spent significant amounts of time on science homework had average achievement that was less than students who spent medium amounts of time on science homework (Martin, Mullis, & Foy, 2009). Heitin (2015) found that more time spent on homework led to lower scores, revealing that this is a consistent trend over time and that there is a point of diminishing returns for amounts of homework. The academic gains, as well as emotional benefits such as reduced anxiety, as shown by Bembenutty (2011), were evident for students who do complete appropriate amounts of assigned schoolwork and homework. Learning what middle school teachers perceive is a proper amount of homework is also of benefit to students for success.

Teachers have the responsibility to independently or with colleagues develop most homework assignments, but with that responsibility comes flexibility, which can often create disparities between teachers teaching the same subject (Trautwein, Niggli, Schnyder, & Lüdtke, 2009). Purposeful homework is typically modeled in the classroom; students see the connection between completion and success, meaningful homework would expect a variety of correct answers, and would include tiers working toward higher levels of success (Bembenutty, 2011). Homework should involve making connections to the world, applying previous learning and real-world situations, welcome but not require parental involvement, understand the diversity among students, be personalized, take advantage of teachable moments, and keep current with

the curriculum (Bembenuddy, 2011). Teachers recognize that the amount should be age-appropriate, should allow for flexibility in scheduling, and should be able to be completed independently (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011). These are hefty requirements, but as teachers are the professionals who most interact with students and observe the effective and ineffective homework strategies, finding what middle school teachers perceive as useful provides insights that standardized testing cannot; because “teachers see ongoing formative assessments, class participation, and performance on class assignments as much more important measures of student learning” (Rebora, 2012, p. 14) than standardized testing.

Organization. The review of literature began with keyword searches including variations of the terms *adolescent motivation, amount/benefits of schoolwork and homework, digital/traditional assignments, homework best practices/expectations, homework interventions, and homework management, homework persistence, middle school/ schoolwork and homework, homework and engagement/learning/purpose, student grit*, among others. Research material selection was based upon relevance and those studies completed as close as possible to 2018 when this research began and then continued into 2020. Research themes focused on the purpose, types, and benefits of homework, desired outcomes for students, homework elements or practices negatively or positively affecting student homework completion, and factors affecting homework completion for middle school students. These subtopics then led to the belief that middle school teachers who regularly work with students and assign homework can best inform the middle school teachers’ perceptions related to the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students’ homework assignment completion in middle school classrooms. When finding research studies focused on middle school homework,

very little information focused on the professional educators' perceptions about what is effective in getting students to increase homework assignment completion.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is a tool used to inform the direction of the study (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017); in this case, to gain an understanding of which homework assignments, as perceived by middle school teachers, most effectively result in students submitting completed assignments. The conceptual framework that drives this study is based on Constructivist Theory and informs the research process, methodology, and data collection and analysis. Constructivist Theory states that learning is an active process and requires the learner to build upon and connect authentic learning with previous knowledge (McLeod, 2019). Homework incompleteness by students is a concern for many teachers in the United States (Bembenutty, 2011; Bennett, 2017) because if students do not engage in the required practice, their ability to make connections can be limited. Application of the conceptual framework of Constructivist Theory can help teachers interpret the phenomenon that some homework assignments are more effective than others and may help them identify those more effective homework assignments. If Constructivist theorists say that knowledge is constructed through authentic learning (McLeod, 2019), then teachers should look for homework opportunities which build upon prior learning and allow for students to make connections with the content.

This study uses the Constructivist Theory regarding how students learn from homework and inform how middle school teachers can craft effective homework assignments. Once identifying middle school teacher perceptions of what improves students' homework completion, the researcher needs to share relevant information to assist other middle school teachers in their specific content area related to homework. An analysis of what middle school teachers perceive

promotes increased student homework completion may lead to other inferences regarding students and homework completion.

The literature review led the researcher to theories related to engagement and actively involving learners related to homework completion. The conceptual framework for this study identifies how to use relevant and established theories such as Constructivist Theory that teachers can use to understand what contributes to increased completed homework assignments. Constructivist Theory, a learning theory, states that “learning is an active, contextualized process of constructing knowledge rather than acquiring it. Knowledge is constructed based on personal experiences and hypotheses of the environment” (Learning Theories, 2016, para. 2). If learners are to be successful, according to the Constructivist Theory, they must be active, engaged, and involved, as motivation is a crucial component of learning (Hein, 1991). Teachers can use that understanding of Constructivist Theory to look for homework assignments that require students to be active, engaged, and involved as well as to make connections with previous learning.

Topical Research

Research by Xu, Fan, and Du (2015) revealed that motivation and time management impact whether students complete schoolwork or not. Further, Xu et al. (2015) found a positive correlation with academic success and student work completion; it is essential to explore what contributes to increased homework completion and develop proper resources or practices for students. Núñez et al. (2015), found that students with higher levels of homework support at home had positive correlations with academic achievement that allowed learning gaps between peers to develop. Balfanz, Herzog, and Iver (2007) noted that students often acquired successful schoolwork habits in the middle grades, and if not correctly formed, these missing habits could lead to student disengagement, and potentially those students may drop out of school. These

work habits, as described by Balfanz et al., (2007), included attendance, misbehaviors, and commitment to schoolwork. When schools and teachers develop methods to support opportunities for student completion of homework, bridging the learning gap leading to academic success is possible (Schou, 2015). Much of the research from the literature review focused on high school or higher education homework, leaving middle school students as an under-investigated population, particularly relating to teacher perceptions about what is successful at getting the middle school student to increase homework completion.

Teachers across disciplines and grade levels often agree the science of pedagogy has changed over the last quarter-century, and former methods used in education have proved less successful as society enters an age with more technology and shifts in societal norms (Desrochers, 2018). Students need the proper skills, knowledge, and tools for success with homework as an important step towards academic-related desired-outcomes for individual students, teachers, and districts (Balfanz, et al., 2007). These skills, knowledge, and tools can help students motivate themselves leading to increased work completion (Guskey, 2005).

Researching the phenomenon of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion as perceived by middle school teachers may help otherwise struggling students. These students may then find the motivation to complete work and find success and can benefit those students and the overall flow of the lesson in the classroom (Bembenutty, 2011). Students encounter a variety of factors that impact their experiences and abilities, including varying amounts of parental support, available time, learning difficulties, lack of resources, etc., and these factors may limit equal opportunities for all students (Shields, 2010), particularly in this digital age. Much research has gone into homework for older students, but middle school teacher perceptions about homework have been under-researched.

There is research that supports the elimination of homework (Goldberg, 2007). Unfortunately, the relatively low cost of homework compared to other initiatives have kept homework as a primary driver for trying to improve academic achievement among students (Eren & Henderson, 2011). Hinchey (1996) and Wilson and Rhodes (2010) found that time demands on students have only increased over the past few decades and have overwhelmed most students with activities that increasingly draw upon their time resources. When this occurs, homework is often one of the first casualties. Hinchey (1996) further shows that students do not see the point in homework and, as other studies have continued to show, and as Hayward explains, understanding the motivation for why one should complete homework is critical in promoting student engagement in completion of homework (2010). Wilson & Rhodes (2010) revealed some benefits when eliminating homework if students do not understand what to do or how to do it because the homework has no value if students cannot complete it themselves. One might argue that homework does not always equate to higher grades, but other research shows that positive student skills leading to higher grades develop in middle school (Katz, et al., 2013).

Identified homework practices for middle-grade students that promote positive homework habits, create positive reinforcement for learning, and provide appropriately supported homework likely contributes to increases in academic success (Valle, et al., 2016). Conley (2016) stated that a multitude of differences in student performance at various grade levels exists, and those characteristics include teacher quality, size of the school, teacher turnover, race, school to school transitions, for example, and all play a role in and impact student achievement. While some of these characteristics exist outside the control of schools, districts, teachers, and administrators, this research study focused on middle school teachers' perceptions of what homework assignments influence students to increase homework completion.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is useful in helping the researcher to identify the key concepts being examined and show connections between the related theories that contribute to the study under investigation (Creswell, 2015). The theoretical framework further helps explain the postulations and beliefs of the researcher by showing the relationship the researcher sees between prior studies, theories, and research and the connection to the study at hand. The theoretical framework is a component of the conceptual framework, Constructivist Theory, that is driving this study.

Constructivist Theory

Constructivist Theory is a learning theory based on identified significant tenets, including that knowledge is constructed through active engagement, learning involves social interactions, learning is personal to the learner, and learning takes place in the mind (McLeod, 2019). Constructivist Theory has been refined over time by several philosophers and psychologists, including Jean Piaget saying new learning must be adapted to fit with prior learning (McLeod, 2019). Lev Vygotsky, a social constructivist, showed how learning should involve guided interactions to help learners build concepts in their minds (Lamon, 2019). John Dewey stated learners find success in situations where experiences have meaning and import (Lamon, 2019), and Jerome Bruner was concerned with the manner of presentation of material to be learned (McLeod, 2019).

Understanding that learning is an active process involving interactions, experiences, and connections to prior knowledge for the learner leads one to believe that the learner must be engaged with the learning, and learning cannot be a passive process, so middle school teacher perceptions of what is effective at actively involving the learner is paramount. Since learning

must be active, the learner must be involved with and make meaning from the information learned in a way that makes sense in a personal way (WNET, 2004). This information implies that if not all students return to class with homework completed and prepared to engage in a classroom activity or lesson, then no student in the classroom will have the full benefit of the lesson as opportunities for engagement, communication, and collaboration are less effective (Hallatt et al., 2017). The role of teachers is vital with Constructivist Theory, “teachers in this theory function as facilitators whose role is to aid the student when it comes to their own understanding” (Teachnology, n.d., para. 3). Finding that teachers are facilitators of learning means they must strive to use practices and assignments designed to involve students and help students complete those assignments.

Theoretical Strengths and Weaknesses

The use of Constructivist Theory underscores the importance of having highly engaging homework which middle school students will want to complete. According to Constructivist Theory, learning must be active; the learner must be engaged and make meaning from the information learned in a way that makes sense in a personal way, so teachers creating homework students will want to complete is paramount (Lamon, 2019; McLeod, 2019). As Reduan (2014) maintained, highly driven students with certain instructional practices will use strategies, including choice in assignments, to solve problems and find a reason to complete assigned work. Identifying homework assignments that teachers can select that best support students toward higher academic achievement within the educational environment are numerous; investigations into these factors perceived as most effective by the professional educators in the classroom at the middle school level are lacking.

Stoddard and Dallmann-Jones (2010) identified a failing educational system in the United States, due to several factors including not developing unique talents, gifts, and abilities, and teaching at a pace misaligned with the students. This disconnect between student needs and misaligned pacing requires remediation by parents, teachers, administrators, and school committee members who must work together to redefine the main priorities and goals of the school and perhaps even the rationale for homework (Miller, 2018). The guiding principles listed by Stoddard & Dallmann-Jones (2010) include the need to value student uniqueness, draw out student talents, respect autonomy, invite inquiry, promote professionalism within the field, and unite the stakeholders for the benefit of students. These principles all connect to Constructivist Theory (Teachology, n.d.). Xu (2011, 2013) conducted several studies focusing on schoolwork completion and management of schoolwork and found direct relationships between schoolwork completion and academic success, so learning middle school teachers' perceptions related to the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion will inform the field and those findings may be used to help students move toward higher levels of success and achievement. The investigation of homework assignments may inform educators about what contributes toward getting students to increase completion of their homework.

While a theoretical framework can guide research, determine what is measurable, and identify relationships to seek, limitations to the theoretical framework exist (Roberts, 2010). Constructivist Theory omits strategies that might motivate students who are disengaged and disinterested or are more passive learners (Daniels, 2011) and does not directly address how to engage students who have a genuine dislike for the content, suffer from emotional or family problems which can overwhelm the student, or present a range of learning differences in a

classroom. Learning about middle school teachers' perceptions of what is effective at getting students to increase homework completion, including for those students who are resistant, can be beneficial for many educators.

Homework Completion

A common challenge in classrooms within public schools across the United States is lack of homework completion by students (Bembenutty, 2011; Cooper et al., 2006; Schrader, 2016; Xu, 2011). One way to better understand students and homework is to ask middle school teachers about what they perceive as effective in getting students to complete homework which, according to this literature review, has not been investigated. There is much research about homework for high school or higher education students, but very little regarding middle school teachers' perceptions related to the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion. Many studies have investigated why students do not complete homework, how to improve homework accuracy (Trautwein, et al., 2009), or what contributes to students completing homework, (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011). This study seeks to explore the phenomenon of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion as perceived by middle school teachers. Lack of homework completion often begins a process of poor performance for students, which may result in a cascade of other issues in the classroom such as negative attitudes, confusion over current tasks, misbehavior, among other actions (Culver, 2015).

This study examines middle school teachers' perceptions of what is effective in getting students to increase homework completion used in the middle school classroom. Teachers should design schoolwork and homework to provide opportunities for reinforcement, practice,

review, and occasionally an extension of learning for students (Epstein, 2002), but some students cannot or do not complete assigned homework (Katz, et al., 2013; Xu, 2013). Previous research revealed that students who saw the justification of assigned schoolwork and homework are more likely to complete the work, mainly if students recognized the benefits to themselves personally but focused on high school or higher education studies (Carr, 2013; Xu, 2013). Specific investigations into the themes of the homework assigned and completion of homework produced several topics that warranted further investigation as related to the middle school-aged child, grade level, or teacher-developed practice (Chamberlin, Yasué, & Chiang, 2018; Crain, 2007; Hayward, 2010; Heitin, 2015). Research studies have examined scaffolded schoolwork, previews in the classroom before assigned homework, and whether students needed support to complete the work (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). Other research completed regarding ways schoolwork and homework assignments showed variation for completion with different approaches utilized by different teachers (Trautwein et al., 2009) showing standardization between teachers in the same grade and discipline can have some positive and some potentially adverse outcomes.

Several studies related to homework focused on using the work as extensions of learning, and some studies assessed the use of more technology-based approaches such as the flipped classroom model of teaching (Holik, 2016). Unfortunately, few studies concentrated on middle school teachers' perceptions of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion. Without examining the perceptions of middle school teachers in the classroom who most often observe students and what contributes toward getting students to increase assigned homework completion, a gap in the literature exists about how to best proceed with learning what is effective with this age group in increasing homework completion.

Homework has been an element of instruction used by educators since the beginning of public education within the United States (Bembenutty, 2011; Bennett, 2017). Research illustrates a range of support for daily homework through supporting no homework for various grades (Heitin, 2015; Xu, 2011). Homework amounts over time have remained relatively static, while parents' perceptions were often inaccurate regarding the quantity and reason for homework (Dews, 2016). Much of the research has shifted over the years from what amount of homework is appropriate at different grade levels to what the very reason for homework is or should be (Vatterott, 2018). As teachers are the individuals who most interact with students and view homework, teachers are in the position to best inform others about middle school teachers' perceptions related to which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion. Without this input about middle school teachers' perceptions of what is successful in getting students to increase homework completion, a gap in knowledge exists that goes unfilled.

Rationale for Homework

This research showed that students knowing and understanding the reasons for a schoolwork or homework assignment (Carr, 2013) and understanding the expected outcomes assisted them in attempting to complete assigned schoolwork and homework (Epstein, 2002). Schoolwork should be at an appropriate level for reinforcement and student enrichment (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020b). Often school policy allows the assignment of homework throughout the week to practice, prepare, provide alternative assessment, and extend learning with the expectation that students may have assigned homework nightly (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020b).

Homework. One could seek connections or relationships among school districts with similar state scores and homework policies looking for trends but asking middle school teachers what they perceive is most effective at getting students to complete homework can have specific benefits and students may be more likely to complete homework if they see the reason behind the work (Shields, 2018). Teachers should explain the rationale and expected outcomes explicitly, so students understand the purpose and intent behind the assigned tasks and how the homework assists students in their learning. Analyzing under what circumstances homework assignments tend to be effective at getting students to complete homework may lead to inferences regarding homework assignments and promoting increased rates of homework completion.

Feedback. Students need work to be meaningful and must receive timely feedback to engage and for the homework to be effective (Wilson & Rhodes, 2010). Useful feedback helps students find a reason to complete work and then helps students make connections to other class activities (Tas, Sungur, & Oztekin, 2016). Additionally, feedback can be critical and help students complete the cycle of homework as it provides an explicit and logical rationale, supports student completion of the assigned work, and finally, receipt by students of meaningful feedback from their teachers informs the student of successfully met outcomes or where shortcomings exist. For students to have the highest level of gains, “feedback [must] be paired with corrective-activities that offer guidance and direction to students on how to remedy their learning problems” (Guskey, 2005, p. 81).

Amounts of homework. Trends for homework assignments over time appear to focus on extending teaching and learning. Assessing amounts of homework that are reasonable (based on age and grade level), most effective, and of interest to students is vital as too much work often creates an inverse effect on achievement and completion (Freiberg & Driscoll, 1992; Fortney,

2016). Homework amounts over time have remained relatively static, while parents' perceptions were often inaccurate regarding the amount and reason for homework (Dews, 2016), which leads to misunderstandings and potentially a lack of support by the home for school expectations.

Most students in public schools spend an hour or less on homework per day, which has remained unchanged for approximately a half-century although schoolwork amounts and rates have increased in the lower grades (Research Spotlight, n.d.). Measuring the exact amount of time spent by students on homework can be difficult as students will often multi-task or experience distractions affecting student focus and extend the amount of time students spend with homework in front of them (Hallatt et al., 2017).

Research has shown that homework does improve student performance; a meta-analysis of homework completed by Cooper et al. (2006), related to achievement shows more significant amounts of homework did not necessarily continue to increase student homework completion so assigning high-quality homework, as perceived by middle school teachers, is encouraged while avoiding busywork. Eren and Henderson (2008) found that an additional hour of schoolwork is associated with moderate gains in math achievement. An extra hour of homework could be significant, but often the amount of time a student spends on homework is not the only variable impacting a student's achievement. Schools should carefully gauge amounts of homework assigned to students within content areas for the maximum benefit without becoming burdensome and should also consider grade levels, specific or individual student needs, demographics, rationale, expected outcomes, and the approach taken, and specifics involved with the homework (Cooper et al., 2006).

Desired Outcomes/Goals for Homework

Schoolwork and homework benefits students, and more benefits appear at the secondary level related to academic achievement (Hargis et.al., 2017), but without involvement, those benefits diminish. Math homework offered the most significant benefit while other homework, if not executed well, often provides lesser benefits (Eren & Henderson, 2011). Without guidance about student skills such as the arrangement of the homework environment, development of time management strategies, management of distractions, and monitoring due dates, students may not receive the full benefit of assigned homework (Xu, 2013), leaving students falling short of the expected or desired outcomes. Students tend to see the benefits of homework, as shown by Hayward (2010), where students “felt they were more likely to do well on their tests if they did well on their schoolwork” (p. 49). If students do not receive graded work or feedback then they do not know where they need to focus their attention; this further supports the need for feedback from teachers (Cunha, Rosário, Núñez, Nunes, A. R., Moreira, & Nunes, T., 2018) as well as having explicit goals for the homework completion. Students often do see the correlation between homework success and other academic successes; it is vital to provide work that will indeed engage students, and students can experience success independently (Yates, n.d.). “Empirical studies conducted on the subject [of homework], moreover, suggest that the amount of time spent on homework is positively related to academic achievement” (Education in States, 1991, para. 1).

Reasons for Student Disengagement/Incompletion

Homework should be beneficial for students, but not all students receive that benefit due to a variety of factors (Goldberg, 2007), so a teacher knowing one’s students is essential to promote homework completion. Assessing the reasons students do not complete homework gave

insight into how to balance assigned homework with what students could or would complete. Shields (2010) showed that a significant consideration of demographics, noting “it is important to examine all ‘facets of students’ experiences, to ensure a level playing field” (p. 575). Factors affecting student homework completion could include the amount of support available at home, other student commitments taking precedence over homework, whether homework is an independent endeavor, adequate resources to complete work at home, among others (Hargis et al., 2017; Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011; Yates, n.d.). Teachers should ensure students understand what to do and the expectations for each assignment before leaving class as students cannot complete work they do not understand or know how to do. Middle school teachers’ perceptions of what succeeds in getting students to increase homework completion by students have changed with the evolving digital age (Cunha, et al., 2018) and should include sharing of ideas and methods found successful by teachers with others.

Support at home. Not all students possess the same support or resources at home when it comes time for homework, and some students may not be able to complete homework independently. Students have a variety of supports available or lacking at home which impacts their experiences and abilities to complete homework, so an analysis of home support systems informs teachers about what is available or needed to create equal opportunities for students to the greatest extent possible (Shields, 2010) to be able to complete homework within different circumstances. Parental misconceptions could be the result of the parent’s personal experiences in school and specifically middle school, conflicts between the student’s perception and the information sent by the teacher, or even unclear knowledge of expectations laid out by teachers at the start of the school year or term about schoolwork and homework completion (Bembenny, 2011; Dews, 2016; Núñez et al., 2015) can affect a student’s ability to complete homework. If

homework involves technology and digital submission, students often need help with resources or with the process of completing homework to meet the assignment goals (Hallatt et al., 2017). For those without home support, those tasks requiring technology prove even more burdensome, and students more likely do not complete their work. Just as one might modify or adapt an assignment based on a student's learning needs, teachers must also take other factors related to student homework needs into account, which includes home supports. The problem of homework incompleteness can be dire at the secondary level; "just two or three zeros are sufficient to cause failure for an entire semester, and just a few course failures can lead a student to drop out of high school, incurring a lifetime of personal and social consequences" (Reeves, 2004, p. 325). An outcome of teachers drawing from and sharing their perceptions of what influences students toward increased homework completion could deter that cycle of homework incompleteness. Some researchers within the field of pedagogy may argue against the value of assigning homework (Eren & Henderson, 2011) while others may claim homework places an undue burden on public-school students with varied backgrounds who have differing resources at their disposal within the home setting (Carr, 2013).

Other commitments. Oftentimes students, particularly in high school but beginning in middle school, are too busy to complete homework and do not see a rationale for the homework (Bembenutty, 2011; Bennett, 2017; Hinchey, 1996; Katz, et al., 2013; Núñez et al., 2015) which reinforces the need to explain the desired outcomes and provide meaningful feedback to involve students. There is much research about homework for high school or higher education students and commitments that may interfere with homework completion but very little regarding middle school teacher perceptions of homework that increases completion by middle school students particularly those with busy after school schedules (Katz, et al., 2013).

Special populations. Regular education students have trouble with homework at times, and students with special needs or English learners experience increased difficulty with completion, which affects the overall outcomes of assigned homework (Bryan et al., 2004). Students who do not understand an assignment will likely not complete the work and often enter a rather detrimental loop of lack of motivation and preparedness for subsequent classes, which defeats the purpose of any assigned homework (Good & Brophy, 1997; Valle et al., 2016). Adjustments to objectives and goals for individual students with special learning needs are often required (Carr, 2013). As Guskey (2005) wrote, “little variation in the teaching resulted in great variation in student learning” (p. 77), so adjusting teaching and homework strategies and expectations for individuals or specific subgroups can be one positive step.

Effective Homework

Much of the literature related to assigned homework showed connections between homework assignments and a need for practice or reinforcement as essential to gain student buy-in (Wilson & Rhodes, 2010; Yates, n.d.). When parents and students knew the objectives of assigned homework, students were more likely involved in the work, and parents more likely supported their child in homework completion (Dews, 2016). “...well-designed homework that students complete successfully can reinforce classroom learning and allow for additional time on task” (Vatterott, 2009, p. 85).

Students may not intrinsically know how to manage their homework load, so teachers should instruct students regarding strategies to manage homework and plans for completion (Desrochers, 2018). Helping students manage homework may involve creating planning calendars for due dates, using graphic organizers, and setting up timers for working on a particular subject, etc. (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). Research studies have investigated the

inherent problems with lack of homework completion and the effects on student learning, but the focus of these studies was often on high school or higher education students (Hallatt et al. 2011; Xu, 2011). This study explored the phenomenon of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion as perceived by middle school teachers.

Examining why middle school students do not complete homework and what motivates middle school students to complete homework uncovered mixed results about how to increase homework completion among students at the middle school level (Balfanz, et al., 2007). While students have been surveyed regarding homework they like or prefer (Hallatt et al., 2017; Hinchey, 1996) middle school teachers have not been given the opportunity to share their perspectives about what homework is most effective at increasing homework completion by students. Students need guidance on homework environment arrangement, development of time management strategies, breaking work into smaller chunks, limiting distractions, and monitoring due dates with time estimates for work completed to make the student approach to homework most beneficial (Xu, 2013). These are informed by best teaching practices (Tileston, 2011) but do not detail homework assignments, which teachers deem most effective, particularly in middle school, to increase homework completion.

Conclusion

Research studies have investigated the inherent problems with lack of homework completion and the effects on student learning, but the focus of these studies has often been on high school or higher education students (Hallatt et al. 2011; Xu, 2011) and typically not focused on middle school teachers' perceptions of what homework assignments are effective in improving student homework completion creating a gap in research that needs to be addressed. Efforts to improve student homework completion can help to avoid the learning gaps and other

adverse effects that often result from incomplete homework (Learning Gap, 2013). Working to study the phenomenon of which homework assignments from middle school teachers' perspectives are more effective at increasing student homework assignment completion may help set students up for greater academic success and may lead to increased student learning and participation (Bryan et al., 2004).

Initial literature review findings reveal that homework can be essential in increasing student learning when used effectively and when utilizing best-teaching practices (Bryan et al., 2004). Knowledge about middle school teachers' perceptions related to the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion added to the literature. This addition will help educational stakeholders better understand middle school teacher perceptions of what contributes to increased homework completion, what approaches may limit learning inequalities, and help set students up for maximum educational success. Previous research showed that students who personally recognize the benefits of assigned homework will more likely complete the work (Carr, 2013; Shields, 2018; Xu, 2013) so teachers knowing what students see as beneficial can impact student homework completion.

Students often experience external factors impacting their ability to complete homework. Development of a record of middle school teachers' perceptions of what is successful in getting students to increase homework completion may help bridge the learning gap between students and may improve positive outcomes related to homework completion (Bryan et al., 2004; Goldberg, 2007). Limited research exists regarding middle school teacher perceptions regarding what contributes to increased homework completion and further investigation is needed to understand what is effective at the developmental level of adolescent students in the United

States. This study explored the phenomenon of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion as perceived by middle school teachers. As middle school teachers are the individuals who work directly with students and can make observations regarding what contributes to increased homework completion, collecting information from those individual educators helped fill a gap in the literature.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative research method with a phenomenological research design. Brinkmann (2012) says, “Qualitative research methods, such as interviews, fieldwork and paradigmatic approaches like phenomenology or discourse analysis, have been developed in order to throw light upon human experience and social life” (p. 29). This study focused on the phenomenon of which homework assignments are most effective based on middle school teachers’ perceptions and shared lived experiences regarding student homework completion. Researchers Denzin and Lincoln (2008) and Van Manen (2015) shared that studying a phenomenon through the exploration of perceptions and lived experiences is most effective with qualitative research methods. This is due to these types of studies built upon a phenomenon where partiality, meaning, and participant interpretation occurs (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 2007; Ivankova & Creswell, 2008). It is important for the researcher to remain mindful of their own perceptions of the phenomenon studied which allows the researcher to be acceptant of discovered participant interpretations of the phenomenon (Hodgson & Fulford, 2016). This method emphasized the critical aspects of the participants’ experiences and their perceptions of the effectiveness (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) of the assigned homework.

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments, as perceived by middle school teachers, most effectively result in students submitting completed assignments. The basis of discussion was what is effective at getting middle school students to increase assigned homework completion. This study combined qualitative data from a survey and semi-structured interviews with an assessment of archival

homework data samples and notations provided by participants. This qualitative phenomenological exploratory study facilitated the participants' expressing their understanding of the phenomenon. The phenomenon is that some homework assignments are more effective, as perceived by middle school teachers, and result in increased homework assignment completion by students, than others. Through the implementation of constructivist theories using a focus on descriptive information provided by middle school teachers an understanding of the phenomenon was sought. This chapter explains the methods and procedures used to answer the research question, "Which homework assignments, per middle school teachers' perspectives, are most effective at increasing student homework assignment completion?" which guided this study. This methodology includes an explanation of the research design, site description for the study, including the population, characteristics of the participants, and participant selection for inclusion in the study.

The chapter describes the instruments used, the development progression, and data collection procedures. The methodology includes a list of limitations with an explanation of how the study met validity testing and has credibility. Explanations of procedures used for checking transferability, dependability, and confirmability, including a discussion of ethical issues considered and addressed, are also included.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments, as perceived by middle school teachers, most effectively result in students submitting completed assignments. This study examined the phenomenon that some homework assignments, from middle school teachers' perspectives, are more effective at increasing student homework assignment completion.

Research Question and Research Design Support

The research question was focused on the purpose of the research, while the research design supported the gathering and collection of data through the methods and procedures used to answer the research question.

Research Question

The single focused research question which guided this study is:

- Which homework assignments, per middle school teachers' perspectives, are most effective at increasing student homework assignment completion?

Research Design

This researcher determined that a qualitative exploratory research method with a phenomenological research design be used for this study focused on middle school teachers lived experiences and their perceptions of homework assignments they deemed as effective in improving the number of students completing those assignments. Studying phenomena through the interpretation of lived experiences and perceptions is most effective with qualitative research methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Van Manen, 2015). This qualitative exploratory study was utilized to facilitate the understanding of the phenomenon, that some homework assignments are more effective, as perceived by middle school teachers, resulting in increased homework assignment completion. The conceptual framework was based on constructivist theories using a descriptive focus. Phenomenological research was selected as the methodology as this method enabled the researcher to focus on understanding lived experiences or perceptions of individuals through recursive exchanges using survey data and narrative interviews following that survey data while discussing examples of homework regarding the perceived reasoning for the rates of return by students during the scheduled interviews (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). The study

utilized survey questions involving subjective open and closed-ended survey questions, archival homework data including representative samples of homework assigned with completion rates and notations by teachers which described their perceived reasoning for the rates of return by students, and narrative semi-structured teacher interviews to investigate and identify current perceptions of middle school teachers within their content area regarding what contributes to student homework completion. The interviews were intended to help ask sensitive questions (Creswell, 2015) and discussed concepts about middle school teachers' perceptions contributing to increased student homework completion that goes beyond simple questions.

It was anticipated that a review of completed surveys and semi-structured interviews would be completed. Archival homework data, including representative samples of homework assignments with completion rates from 2019-2020, were examined to identify emergent themes from the words or phrases used by teachers to describe their perceived reasoning for the rates of return by students. This examination looked for trends in the archival homework data and sought similarities in assignments with high rates of return. This information was used to identify middle school teachers' perceptions related to the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion and provided insights for the middle school student demographic. Ideally, the participants would have submitted the selection of archival homework data samples prior to the interview for discussion at the request of the researcher but this was not always the case.

Phenomenological inquiry involves a phenomenon and “can be studied in terms of its practical consequences for human living” (Van Manen, 2011, para. 4) by helping to provide “direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced...” (Phenomenology, n.d., para. 1). The phenomenon under study for this researcher was middle

school teachers' perceptions of which homework assignments most effectively result in increased student homework assignment completion. The study of these middle school teachers' stories focused upon how they as individuals made sense of the observations and perceptions (Clandinin & Huber, 2010) they notice in their middle school classrooms. The participants in this study utilized a non-probability convenience sample bounded by grade levels (fifth through seventh grades). Convenience sampling is a sample in which the participants are selected for inclusion due to ease of access (Laerd Research, 2012). Unfortunately, convenience sampling cannot assure that the participants are representative of the greater middle school teacher population (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2015). This study limited the selection of middle school participants who have the opportunity to participate at the study site, due to ease of researcher access (Chatham-Carpenter, Palczewski, Martin, Hall, & DeFrancisco, 2010). The study used surveys, narrative interviews, and archival homework data from groups of middle school science and social studies teachers from a single middle school site.

Site Information

The site for this study was a middle school in a small suburban region in Massachusetts, identified with the pseudonym "Chesterton." The Chesterton region encompasses 22 communities across three counties (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020b). that contains public, private, and charter schools. A pseudonym of "Chesterton Middle School" has been assigned to the middle school. The current building for Chesterton Middle School has been open for less than 10 years and includes grades from the former middle school with the addition of the fifth grade from the three feeder elementary schools. The merger of grades blended the middle school model with a formerly self-contained grade level (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020b). While

middle schools across the United States typically include grades 6-8, schools in the Chesterton region have varied grade orientations including grades 3-8, 5-7, 4-8, 5-8, 6-9, 6-12, 7-8, etc. (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020a). Blending of teachers from different teaching backgrounds, from both elementary and middle school, created some variance in approach within Chesterton Middle School ranging from self-contained elementary teachers, middle school teachers, and some more traditional junior high school teachers to design a model of the modern middle school which is developmentally appropriate for young adolescents (Wormeli, 2016). Grade configuration for Chesterton Middle School is atypical but not unique.

Within Chesterton Middle School's teaching teams, several different initiatives to increase student homework completion rates have been implemented since 2007 with the goal of raising student homework completion. These various initiatives included (a) Zeroes Aren't Permitted (ZAP) program (Appendix A) for several years, (b) emailing a parent each time a student did not turn in homework (Appendix B), (c) having former students volunteer as tutors for current students, (d) having a previous, now adult and very successful, student come and speak to current students about how deciding to commit himself and do well made a significant difference in his schooling and life, (e) providing a homework club for students in special populations such as English Learners or students who are Former English Learners, and (f) getting rid of homework unless it was unfinished classwork.

Population & Sampling Method

The participants were drawn from the selected middle school site as a matter of convenience, ease of accessibility, and access; the researcher is also a teacher at the school in the science department. There are a total of 16 science and social studies teachers within this school,

including the researcher, but the population of middle school teachers surveyed and interviewed only included science and social studies teachers who volunteered to participate. Participation included a survey, distance-technology interview, and the sharing of archival homework data. All participants had to meet the eligibility criteria of being a science or social studies teacher at the site school, assigned homework minimally on a weekly basis, and agreed to the informed consent. Participants completed an online survey and participated in a semi-structured distance interview of approximately 45-minutes. Archival homework data samples from the 2019-2020 school year were requested to be emailed to the researcher and to be available prior to the time of the interview. Teachers were asked that their artifacts include representative samples of homework assigned during the 2019-2020 school year with completion rates (as a ratio or percentage) of the students in their classrooms and words or phrases used by teachers to describe the perceived reasoning for the rates of return by students.

The participant pool included middle school science and social studies teachers who regularly required homework within their classes, meaning minimally once per week and ideally this would be several times per week on average. The study site is a suburban middle school in Massachusetts (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020b) that uses a modified version of the Next Generation Science standards adopted in 2016 and the History and Social Studies frameworks adopted in 2018 (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020a). These frameworks were adopted to "...formalize the expectation that all students in the Commonwealth have access to the same academic content, regardless of their zip code, background, or abilities" (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020a, para. 1). All participants completed the informed consent notice (Appendix C) prior to the start of the study. It should be noted Science and Social Studies

teachers were chosen as a matter of convenience and that English and mathematics teachers were not included as mathematics homework can oftentimes be routine, and English homework varies greatly dependent upon whether students are working on a novel, writing a paper, or working on some other content specific area. Mathematics and English teachers were also less available as a matter of convenience. Ideally, a near-complete sampling of the available science and social studies teachers middle school teachers across all grade levels five through seven provided sufficient perspectives on the topic. The selection of participants met the intended purpose of the study as the focus is on middle school teachers' perceptions of what homework assignments are most effective in getting students to increase homework completion.

All participants work within fifth through seventh grades on one of eight teaching teams in inclusion settings with a non-rotating schedule. There may have been sampling bias as those teachers who chose to participate may have had individual and unknown reasons for participation, while those who chose not to participate may also have had individual and unknown reasons for that choice. The voluntary nature may have created variables and characteristics about the participants that are unknown to the researcher but are a natural product of volunteer participants. The sampling pool included a total of 16 teachers with a goal of 10 participants. "It is typical in qualitative research to study a few individuals or a few cases. That is because the overall ability of a researcher to provide an in-depth picture diminishes with the addition of each new individual or site" (Creswell, 2015, p. 208).

An incentive of three \$100 VISA gift cards, to be presented via a lottery, were used to encourage maximum involvement by the highest number of teachers as possible due to the limited number of potential participants. The compensation statement included, "As compensation for your participation in this study including the survey, interview, and sharing of

archival homework data, you may enter a lottery for a \$100 VISA gift card. A total of three gift cards are available.” Each eligible participant was given a number, and a random number generator was used to select the three participants who received the VISA gift cards.

Field Test

Before the researcher sought Institutional Review Board (IRB) permission to conduct this study, a field test for the web-based survey and interview questions was administered to a group of former middle school teachers. The field test was conducted to test the instruments and record feedback of the field test participants' judgment about the validity and recommendations for alterations to create the finalized survey and semi-structured interview script (Appendix D and Appendix E). The field test participants were selected from a pool of former, but recent colleagues with whom this researcher is well-acquainted, so field test teachers were comfortable with sharing feedback and suggestions for improvement for clarity, navigation, difficulties, errors, and other thoughts or ideas. Those field test participants selected were not otherwise involved in the study but are demographically like those middle school teachers selected to participate in the research and are familiar with the school as they are former middle school teachers at the study site.

The field test was used to ensure (a) instructions were clear and understandable, (b) the wording of questions were unambiguous, (c) there were sufficient choices and clarity available without leaving the participant feeling the need to add more information, (d) the length was not so long as to create fatigue, disinterest, or random answers, (e) the survey/interview was administered without confusion, computer design, or other errors, and (f) the survey was limited by computer settings to the pool of teachers who were involved with the study within the site. A separate copy of feedback questions were provided to field test teachers before taking the survey

and engaging in the interviews to ensure field test participants could take notes which was followed by a discussion with the researcher using the modified guided questions listed by Schultz (as cited in Roberts, 2010). The data collection survey instrument for participants and semi-structured interview questions were adjusted based on the feedback from the field test participants.

Instrumentation & Data Collection Procedures

Qualitative instrumentation for this study was developed utilizing questions from previously used, but modified, closed-ended survey questions, and narrative semi-structured interview questions. These previously used questions were developed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and Institute for Education Sciences: National Center for Education Evaluation (IES: NCEE), which previously passed validity and reliability tests (Appendix F). Survey questions are open and closed-ended; interview questions are open-ended, allowing for more explanation, clarification, and descriptive statements by participants. Interview and survey questions focused on middle school teachers' perceptions of what homework assignments are effective in getting students to increase homework completion. Collected archival homework data included representative archival homework data samples assigned with completion rates (listed as a ratio or a percentage) for each assignment provided by the teachers. The request was made for three or more homework assignments from the 2019-2020 school year with completion rates including high rates of return and a request for words or phrases used by teachers to describe the perceived reasoning for the rates of return by students. Data were analyzed and used to identify middle school teacher perceptions related to the research question.

Research data was collected through open and closed-ended surveys using the REDCap (Research Electronic Data Capture) platform. Semi-structured interviews utilizing narrative

questions was recorded using an iPhone Xs and the Rev Voice Recorder app installed on the iPhone and was conducted via telephone or Google Meet as distance platforms at separate points in time (specifically at times convenient to the participants and the researcher). Collection of archival homework data included representative samples of homework assigned with completion rates and words or phrases used by teachers to describe the perceived reasoning for the rates of return by students and were emailed to the researcher. Information gathered from middle school teacher interviews helped identify emergent themes about middle school teacher perceptions of effective homework assignments. The discrete data from the surveys using specific numerical incidents of events about homework used by middle school teachers, rates of completion, among other questions, independent of the other variables and continuous data from the surveys upon a scale of boundaries used open and closed-ended but somewhat subjective survey questions provided a range of qualitative information to analyze.

Field tests preceded IRB approval, but both participant survey and interview administration with participants took place after IRB approval was received (Appendix I). Survey design was drawn from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and Institute for Education Sciences: National Center for Education Evaluation (IES: NCEE) questions included modifications for subject and grade level-appropriateness and fit for the survey purpose (Fidelman, 2016). Items chosen included questions that fit with the need for qualitative data supporting the variables related to middle school teachers' perceptions of homework assignments which promote greatest homework assignment completion for further explanation in answering the identified research question. Further modifications made were based on feedback from the field-testing group. Requests for participants to share archival homework data for analysis, including representative samples of homework assigned with completion rates and keywords or

phrases used by teachers to describe the perceived reasoning for the rates of return by students, were anticipated to show what contributes to students' completion with certain varieties of homework using more continuous data across grade levels.

In a review of the literature, it was found that existing research supports the use of modified nationally developed survey and interview questions (Creswell, 2015), and collection of archival homework data including representative samples of homework assigned with words or phrases used by teachers to describe the perceived reasoning for the rates of return by students with completion rates to look for trends. As no other research appears to focus on middle school teacher perceptions of effective homework assignments that contributes to increased student homework completion, a modified survey, semi-structured interview questions, and an analysis of archival homework data samples were utilized to explore the phenomenon of homework assignments most effective at increasing student homework assignment completion.

The researcher, upon IRB approval and formal site district permission, prepared and sent a video and text version (Appendix G) to the potential participants' district email addresses and only to the middle school science and social studies teachers. This video and text version, which gave a presentation about the study, showed the researcher explaining the research study, including problem, purpose, research question, eligibility criteria, informed consent, incentives, and schedule for data collection. A brief description of the lottery as compensation was presented. Along with the research study video presentation email, the informed consent letter, and an individualized link for each participant to the REDCap survey accompanied each email to prospective participants through their district email.

Surveys

The survey instrument was field-tested with middle school teachers uninvolved with the collected survey data before IRB permission was obtained. Following the field test survey modifications were made to the survey in order to genuinely assess its intended purpose (Kasprzyk, 1999) to gain an understanding of which homework assignments, as perceived by middle school teachers, most effectively result in students submitting completed homework assignments, according to the research question. The survey was provided via an individualized email link to each of the pool of participants district email addresses within the site school using the REDCap survey platform. This was done for collection and analysis and commenced and was available to participants for a five-week window. Survey questions were categorized by a variety of factors, including (a) forms and methods used with homework, (b) rates of homework completion, and (c) homework most often completed by students. One week after the opening of the survey window, a follow-up email from REDCap was automatically sent to teachers who had not yet participated in the survey as a reminder. At the end of the survey window, survey data was downloaded onto the researcher's personally owned computer, which is password protected and secured in a locked residence with a security system to maintain participants' privacy and security to the greatest extent possible. Data was not collected anonymously so participants would be eligible for the compensation lottery, but data remained confidential with only the researcher having access, and the data was deidentified within the data collection instruments to maintain participant confidentiality from anyone other than the primary researcher to the greatest extent possible.

The teacher survey was comprised of open and closed-ended survey questions and stated there are no known risks, and a benefit includes identifying middle school teacher perceptions

regarding effective homework assignments leading to increased assigned homework completion for middle school students. The survey stated the purpose of the study, consent to participate, the voluntary nature, right to withdraw, procedures, right to ask questions, and assured teachers that neither personal information nor information about the school would be released in the study or dissertation. The introduction followed by descriptive statistical questions began the survey and then questions designed with a range of choices including checkboxes, closed-ended questions about amounts of homework, estimates of percentages of homework completed, and potential reasons for homework incompleteness as modified by this researcher from information found in Bennett (2017) and Kasprzyk (1999).

Interviews

The semi-structured interview questions were field-tested with middle school teachers uninvolved with the collected interview data. This field test tested the questions as well as the audio recording features of the iPhone Xs and the transcription procedures for Rev.com. Adjustments to the interview questions were made to improve the interview protocol. Immediately upon completion of the survey, participants were asked to schedule their interview within two weeks of the survey's completion. This 45-minute interview was offered via a distance communication platform such as telephone, FaceTime, Zoom, Google Meet, or some other communication distance platform (virtual or telephone). Participants were requested to email to the researcher three or more samples of homework assigned during the 2019-2020 school year with associated students' completion rates and words or phrases used by participants to describe the perceived reasoning for the rates of return by students. However, those samples were accepted by email after the interview if needed. If interviews were not scheduled within

one week of survey completion, a reminder email was sent to those who had not yet scheduled the interview.

Confidentiality was assured following the recommendations of Creswell (2015) and Burke & Miller (2001) using "...specific and useful suggestions for successfully using phone interviewing as a means of data collection in research (article 7, p. 1). Interviews began with a review of informed consent, permission to record the interview and were followed by open-ended questions about homework assigned, completion of homework by students, and the rigor of completed and incomplete homework, modified by this researcher from information found in Bennett (2017) and Kasprzyk (1999). The interview question number varied dependent upon whether teachers had previously emailed archival homework data samples prior to the time of the interview and the number of follow up questions. Participants were directed to make note of regularly used homework within their classes and to estimate rates of homework, rates of completion, rates of high incompleteness, and techniques used that proved effective at involving students who demonstrate a low interest in homework completion. Participants were requested to recall two specific but unidentified students who began to complete more homework and reflect on reasoning and participant perceptions regarding the cause of the increase in homework completion by those students. If participants had emailed archival homework data samples prior to the interview, a discussion of the samples took place at that time. The interview concluded with a request that participants who had not already emailed archival homework data samples submit those samples within two weeks if possible, with a request for a minimum of three or more samples of homework assigned during the 2019-2020 school year noting the on-time completion of each sample and words or phrases used by teachers to describe the perceived reasoning for the rates of return by students.

Archival Homework Data

Archival homework data, including representative samples of homework assignments with completion rates from 2019-2020 and words or phrases used by teachers to describe the perceived reasoning for the rates of return by students, were used to identify patterns in an effort to assist in answering the research question. This collection and analysis of archival homework samples expected to provide insights into the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion. Participants were offered the opportunity to share archival homework data before the interview to allow for discussion of the sample, or after the interview. Participants who supplied homework after the interview were requested to provide some follow-up information via email. Archival homework data samples were reviewed and assessed for common trends in the archival homework data seeking similarities in assignments with high rates of return and deemed most beneficial related to the research question. Through the lens of the Constructivist Theory framework (Daniels, 2011; Gupta, 2017), it was hoped this archival homework data would show that how middle school teachers assigned homework might have commonalities that led to homework completion by looking for patterns in the highest rates of return and the descriptors provided by the participants.

Data Collection

Participating middle school teachers completed the informed consent as part of the survey. Surveys occurred online at times convenient for the participants via a link placed on an email using REDCap, suggesting approximately 20-minutes required to complete the survey. The link to the survey was available only to the convenience sample of middle school science teachers and social studies teachers at the site location. The link to REDCap began with the

stated purpose of the survey and restated informed consent. The survey was available for five weeks, so teachers were able to return to the survey as they had time to do so. If teachers did not agree to the informed consent by clicking “Proceed” then they received a notice of “thank you” and were unable to engage in the survey. Upon completion of the survey, an automated email from REDCap returned an additional digital copy of the informed consent document to the participants with a reminder to schedule a distance (virtual or telephone) interview and submit via email three or more archival homework data samples to the researcher. Assurance was given to participants that no personal information or information about the school would be included in the study. A second reminder request was automatically sent to participants that had yet to complete the survey after one week of the initial email invitation. Study data were collected and managed using REDCap electronic data capture tools hosted at the University of New England. REDCap is a secure web application for building and managing online surveys and databases and is specifically geared to support online data capture for research studies and operations (Harris, Taylor, Thielke, Payne, Gonzalez & Conde, 2009).

A second data instrument was a recorded semi-structured participant interview. Interviews took place using a distance communication platform such as telephone or Google Meet agreed upon by the researcher and participant. The semi-structured narrative teacher interview was recorded using the Rev Voice Recorder App on an iPhone Xs and transcribed using Rev.com. A second reminder request was sent to participants that had yet to complete the survey after one week of the initial survey submission.

The semi-structured interview began with (a) an explanation of the voluntary nature, (b) participant’s right to withdraw, (c) the study’s purpose, procedures, and right to ask questions, (d) assurances to participants that neither their personal information, nor information

about the school will be released in the study, (e) there are no known risks involved, and (f) a benefit includes discovering middle school teachers' perceptions of what homework assignments are effective in getting middle school students to increase homework completion.

Interview transcripts were returned to teachers via email with an opportunity for participants to adjust as needed and resubmit with requests for corrections as a form of member-checking. The data from the survey, interview, and archival homework records were used concurrently to look for themes or trends to assist in answering the research question.

Archival homework data was requested from participants which included representative samples of homework from the 2019-2020 school year assigned with completion rates and words or phrases used by teachers to describe teacher perceived reasoning for rates of return by students. Teachers were encouraged to email the archival homework data samples prior to the interview to be included in the discussion but could submit the samples after the interview if needed. If archival homework data samples were provided after the interview a follow-up email was sent if additional information were needed. A second reminder request was sent to participants that had yet to email the archival homework samples after one week of the completion of the interview.

Data Collection followed the pattern, as shown below in Data Collection Sequence (Figure 2).

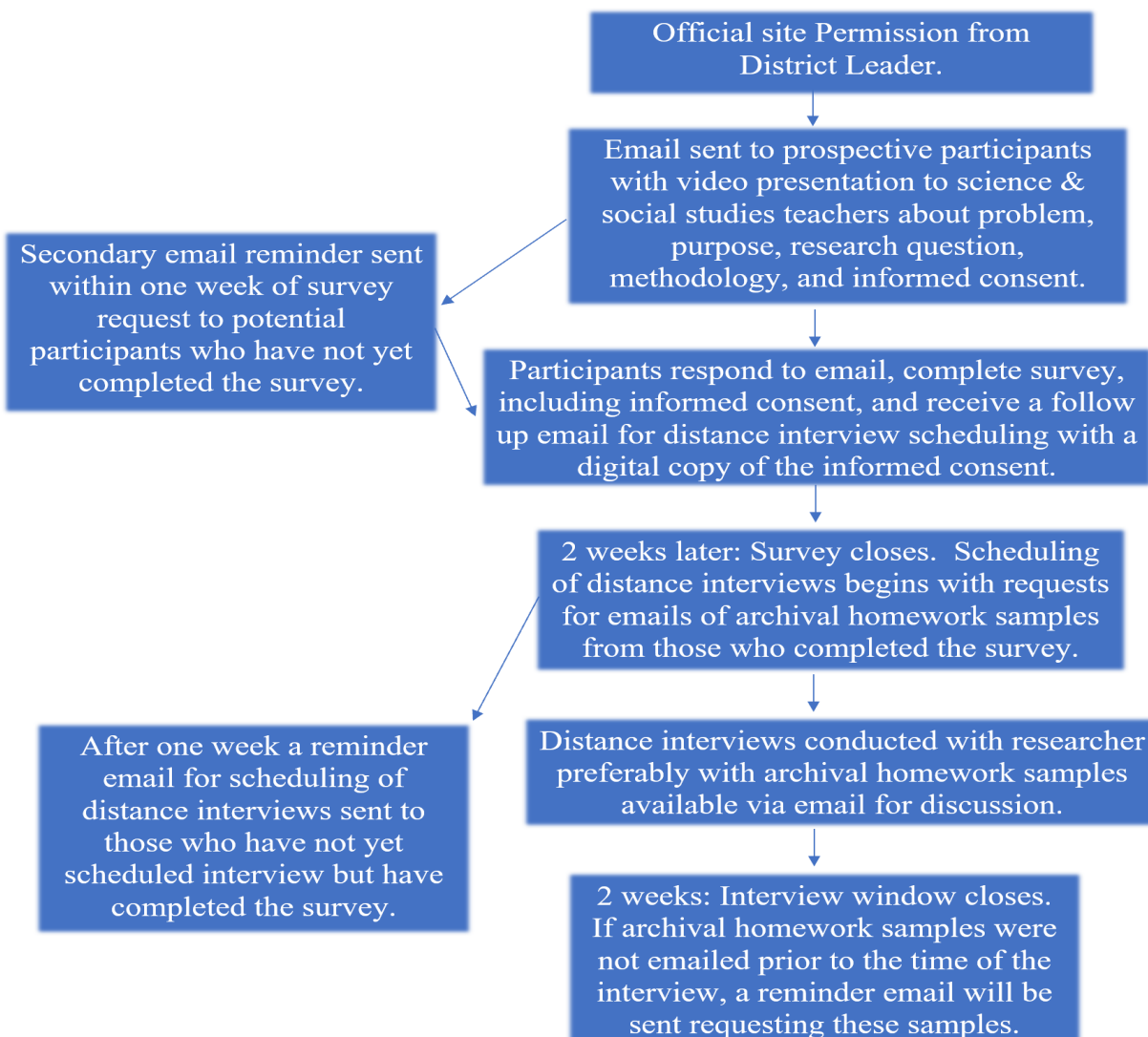


Figure 2 Data collection sequence

Data Analysis

The analysis of data included collating and analyzing the data connected to the phenomenon of teachers' perceptions of effective homework assignments that increase students' homework assignment completion for middle school students. This researcher intended to "seek to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon by collecting multiple forms of data" (Creswell, 2015, p. 469), including survey data, interview data, and archival homework data samples for study.

Survey Data

Data from the teacher survey collected through REDCap was aggregated into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for collation and organization of responses. This process helped determine trends among middle school teacher perceptions across grade levels. The goal was to determine what middle school teachers perceive influences students to increase homework completion in various grades within the middle school. Variables included data regarding assigned homework, frequency of homework, and rates of homework completion for different attributes, seeking connections between the homework with higher student completion. The collection of averages of scores of all surveyed data by grade level were placed into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for ease of analysis and presentation using formulas to find trends within the data. As the survey questions contained some numerical values and some narrative data, the narrative information was clustered into groups by the researcher to identify emerging trends.

Interview Data

The second instrument, the narrative interview responses conducted at a distance (virtual or telephone), were recorded using the Rev Voice Recorder App on an iPhone Xs and then transcribed using Rev.com. Using researcher coding and MAXQDA, data was coded and analyzed searching for themes (Hughes & Radiker, 2019). After transcription and close analysis/close reading and review the researcher used Creswell's steps for coding data (2015):

1. Conduct an initial review of the text data and jot down ideas.
2. Analyze one piece of text and determine the overall meaning.
3. Begin to code the text by identifying text segments.
4. Make a list of code words and create groups based upon similarity.
5. Identify quotes that support codes.

6. Reduce the codes into major themes.

Emerging codes and themes in teacher provided information were grouped into related sections. The analysis of the interview data was thorough and concise, and looked for insightful and relevant codes (Creswell, 2015, Merriam, 2009). Thematic notes could potentially reveal the relevant interpretation of data that connected to the literature and the conceptual framework (Creswell, 2015). The researcher used MAXQDA to further identify codes and themes for synchrony.

Archival Homework Data

Archival homework data, including representative samples of homework assigned with student completion rates, and words or phrases used by teachers to describe their perceived reasoning for rates of return by middle school students, were reviewed looking for trends. This review looked for trends in the archival homework data seeking similarities in assignments with high rates of return. When archival homework data was emailed to the researcher prior to the interview, the homework samples became part of the interview as details about each sample were discussed (Appendix E) to allow collection of further information about each sample, the rate of return, and perceptions the participant had about the assignment. Teachers who had not provided homework samples prior to the interview were requested to provide additional information via email. This information shed light on patterns related to the assignments with high rates of submission. The information regarding grade, subject, general type of assignment, completion rate, and keywords or phrases noted by teachers were recorded on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet was used to document trends and relationships between types of homework assignments and rates of student completion as related to the research question.

Homework samples were given a numeric identifier and all data from the sample, provided by teachers about the rate of return as a ratio or percentage, and description of the perception of the rate of return were reviewed by the researcher. Information from the interviews about individual homework samples as well as from follow-up emails about the homework samples was assessed to answer the research question.

Data Synthesis

Data synthesis is the collection of data from multiple sources to create an understanding of a defined event that summarizes the information (Roberts, 2010); in this case the phenomenon was, what homework is most effective at increasing student homework completion as perceived by middle school teachers (Figure 3).

Summary data collected from the surveys, interviews, and analysis of archival homework data samples were collated and assessed for middle school teachers' perceptions of what homework assignments are effective in increasing homework completion. Data collected included homework assignments, rates of completion, and keyword or phrases presented by middle school teachers for each grade level and subject area and displayed in a data table.

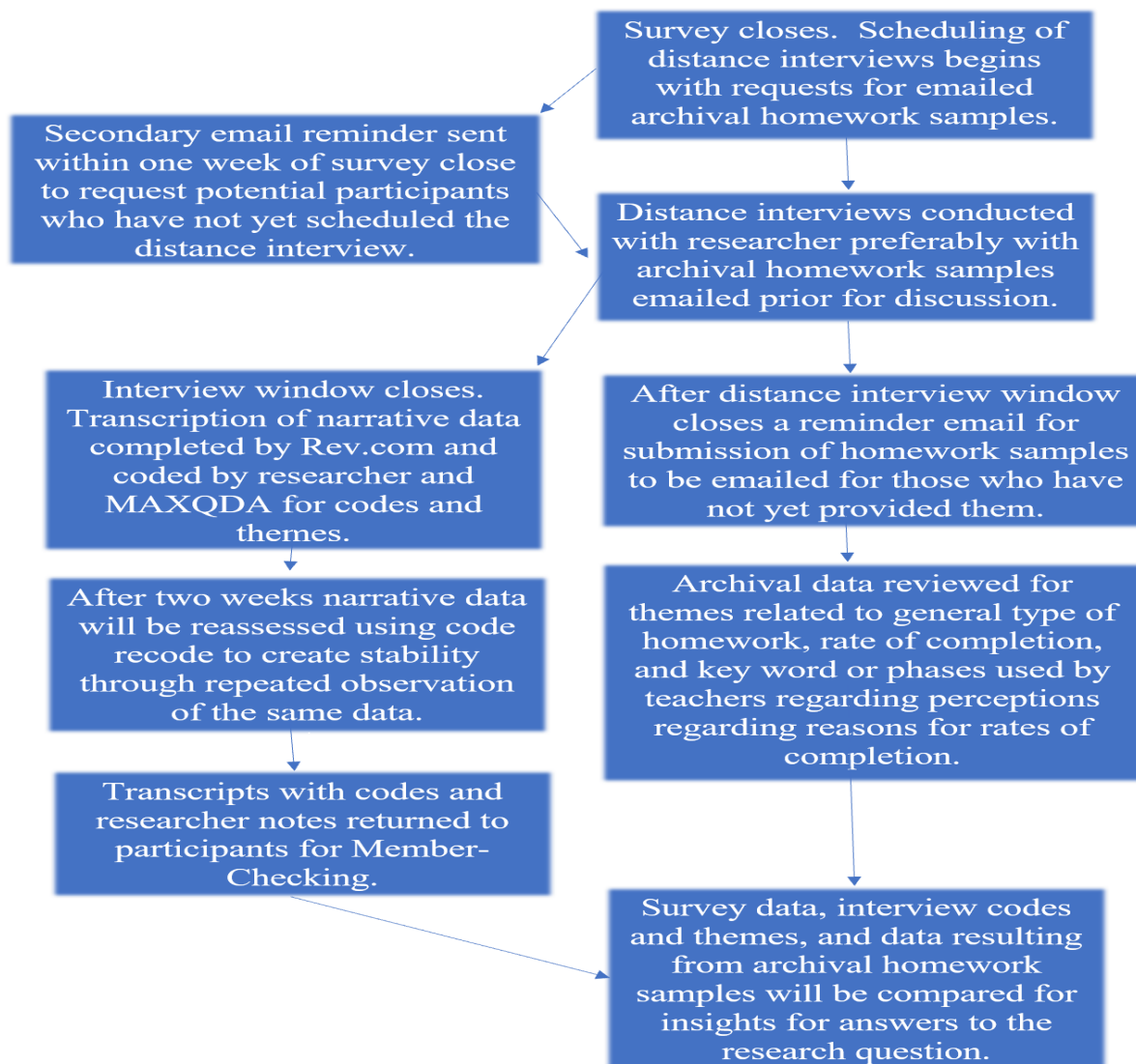


Figure 3 Data synthesis sequence

Limitations of the Research Design

The following are limitations and delimitations of this research study thus far identified. Limitations are those elements causing problems with a research study but allow the research to continue once acknowledged if those instances did not result in unusable or unreliable data (Creswell, 2015). Delimitations are the boundaries set up by the researcher to control the extent, range, and variables within the study (Creswell, 2015). Often delimitations are developed to manage the scope, the time needed, or the cost of the study (Creswell, 2015). Credibility,

dependability, transferability, and confirmability are components that strengthen this study's research design (Statistics Solutions, 2019b).

Limitations

The middle school teachers who met eligibility criteria had opportunities to participate voluntarily which limited the number of participants. As teachers reported their homework trends, it is possible they might over- or under-report their students' performance if they did not collect and report specific data. Homework types were reviewed looking for trends and assessing the use of teacher provided keywords or phrases describing perceptions regarding reasons for rates of return. There are variations in homework expectations for students at varying grade levels potentially reducing comparability among the same subject across grade levels or even among the same grade level between individual teachers. These variations could be construed as limitations to the consistency of the research and the method of data collection but could also show the need for homework type variation between grades and subject areas.

Another limitation could be the short-term nature of the study. Completing this study longitudinally using the same cohort of teachers would provide data over time and may have improved the consistency of teacher responses over time. With the limitation of part of a single school year, the results were a snapshot of teacher perceptions at a given time and could have varied from day to day or week to week. Another limitation is the very small sample size of the middle school teacher participants. With only eight science teachers and eight social studies teachers available to survey, it is possible that this sample was not representative of the larger population of middle school subject teachers across the state, region, or nation.

Delimitations

Delimitations listed here are specific to the design and integrity of this study. Using data from all subject area teachers could have provided further information rather than relying only upon the convenience sample of the participating teachers. This study has delimitations to focus the scope within the given timeframe, location, and persons involved.

Credibility

Credibility of the method describes how the research findings are credible or trustworthy (Creswell, 2015). Several methods were used to try to ensure credibility, including member-checking, where a participant could confirm their data and responses, or how responses were transcribed and then presented correctly to assure data validity.

Member checking procedures. Respondent validation through member checking was the technique used for ensuring the credibility of the results of surveys and semi-structured narrative interviews. “Member checking is a qualitative technique used to establish the tenet of credibility in trustworthiness. It means showing that the findings are accurate and honest” (Statistics Solutions, 2019a). Surveys allowed teachers to stop and return to the survey so no time constraint rushed the participant, and the participants could review their answers. During survey completion, participants received a message stating, “After review, if you find any errors within your responses you would like corrected, please contact the researcher within five business days, and adjustments can be made as needed.” This review by participants allowed opportunities to expand and better explain answers and created a dialogue of further narrative data responses. Since participants allowed recording during the distance interview (virtual or telephone), the researcher was able to return the transcript to each participant. Using member checking, the likelihood of accurate descriptions by participants provided a second opportunity

for review without changes or misinterpretation by the researcher. The final synthesis of the data analysis was available to participants upon request for further review as an additional form of member-checking.

Transferability

Transferability involves “the possibility of the results of a qualitative study ‘transferring’ to another setting...[using] rich, thick description” (Merriam, 2009, p. 227). The study may also present transferability in demographically similar schools and assist in determining middle school teachers’ perceptions related to the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students’ homework assignment completion. The phenomenon is that some homework assignments are more effective, as perceived by middle school teachers, that result in increased homework assignment completion than others and this study asks, what are those assignments?

Higher numbers of teacher responses within this study or future studies would increase transferability. This study’s replication could take place if conducted in a demographically similar school district among middle school teachers in fifth through seventh grades. The data instruments and resources listed in the appendices are available to duplicate this research design as desired by other researchers. Transferability, meaning all necessary materials are available for study replication in a different setting by other researchers if desired, assuring the confidence and validity in the study (Merriam, 2009). As the results of this study demonstrate a snapshot in time, further investigations may provide additional information to help better inform researchers on the topic of middle school teachers’ perceptions of what contributes to increased homework completion by students.

Dependability

Dependability was established for the qualitative data using the researchers identified themes and MAXQDA (Hughes & Radiker, 2019) to further identify themes in teacher-provided information and coding of themes within the interview data. The researcher used the research question and conceptual framework to identify common themes while the MAXQDA program identified additional related themes. The researcher used code-recode procedures to revisit the coding of themes after 2-weeks away from the data so that a comparison with the MAXQDA data completed again would create stability through repeated observation of the same data (Universal Teacher, 2019). Identification of similar trends and findings in the survey data, interview coded data, and archival homework data helped to inform consistency. An assessment of responses along with grade levels potentially shows consistency, further making the results more dependable. The replicability of the study allows a future researcher to repeat the work elsewhere or at another time if desired.

The use of modified survey questions and semi-structured interview questions drawn from nationally recognized agencies help confirm reliability and validity (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Items were taken from the National Center for Education Statistics, and Institute for Education Sciences: National Center for Education Evaluation and have been previously used and passed validity and reliability tests (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Using these questions related to homework completion helped identify those middle school teachers' perceptions of what succeeds in getting students to improve homework completion to answer the research question.

Confirmability

“Confirmability in Qualitative Research means the degree to which the outcomes could be confirmed or corroborated by other people” (Universal Teacher, 2016, para. 1). Data analyzed and questioned for falsifiability sought if the data had credence by looking for contradictions in the data where high academic success might align with lower rates of homework completion (Center for Innovation, n.d.). Further, analysis of archival homework data was based on a range of rates of homework completion by students looking for trends that confirmed or refuted the connection between middle school teacher perceptions regarding effective homework assignments that increase homework completion based upon keyword or phrase notations made by teachers. In addition, an audit trail was used when chronicling the results of the research where the researcher reported and annotated the details of data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of data in the researcher’s notes which helped to identify the progression of thought by the researcher as data was processed and recorded (Statistical Solutions, 2020).

Ethical Issues in the Study

Ethical practices are the complex matters the researcher must consider at the forefront of the researcher’s agenda (Creswell, 2015). These considerations include respecting the site, maintaining minimal disruption to the site, engaging with the site leaders, and avoiding the mistreatment of participants including obtaining the informed consent of those participants (Creswell, 2015). The Institutional Review Board (IRB) review played a significant role in the protection of participants. Ethical practices were built into the methodology and played a vital role in “data collection and reporting and distribution of reports” (Creswell, 2015, p. 23). This included respect for the site by gaining permission to conduct the study with ongoing

communication with the leader of the site school system and principal of the site school. Finally, ethical considerations included the elimination of bias to the greatest extent possible and disclosing any connections and suspending prior beliefs related to the topic by the researcher.

Researcher Affiliation

The researcher has been an employee of this district for over a decade as a science teacher and has had direct contact with the other science teachers during monthly department meetings. This connection should not pose an issue as the researcher does not work closely with seven of the eight other middle school science teachers as they teach a different grade level with a different curriculum and are in separate wings of the building which resulted in little personal interaction beyond the monthly department meetings. The only regular communication with the one remaining science teacher was during monthly department meetings during curriculum mapping and occasionally during afterschool teacher-directed meeting sessions when working on common curriculum. This researcher is also on a teaching team with one of the eight available social studies teachers. The collegial and friendly relationship between the researcher and this social studies teacher should not interfere with the participant/teacher's ability to be honest and truthful, and the researcher and this teacher share common students but not a common curriculum, supervisor, or any other variable. This researcher believes that the previous direct contact with the participants did not affect the data collected.

Informed Consent

The researcher has maintained contact with the superintendent and principal of the site school through the evolution of the study development. Permission was granted and received in writing by the superintendent to conduct the study (Appendix H). The problem, purpose of the study, research question, needs of the researcher, and informed consent were clearly explained to

all participants. Informed consent was explained before the participant's receipt of the email prompting the surveys, and the email included a digital copy of the informed consent as well. An additional copy of the informed consent document also accompanied an email generated by REDCap after survey submission. Informed consent was reviewed again verbally before conducting the distance interviews (virtual or telephone). The initial description of the survey and interviews included the purpose of the research and the first item was the informed consent information, which explained the voluntary nature, right to withdraw, procedures, right to ask questions, assurance to teachers that neither personal information, nor information about the school would be released in the dissertation, included known risks and the potential for unknown risks. A benefit described included learning the outcomes of middle school teacher perceptions regarding what contributes to increased homework completion by students within this site school for middle school students. REDCap utilized teachers' district email addresses, but participant names were replaced with alphabetic pseudonyms for the surveys and interviews for increased discretion so the researcher could follow up with participants as needed. Numerical pseudonyms were assigned to the archival homework data samples provided. No other individuals had access to the research data. The school and district were deidentified to protect the identities of the participants further. Summaries of the data analysis, with deidentified data, were available to those participants who requested follow-up information. Survey data, interview recordings, and coded transcript data were saved on the researcher's personal computer located in a private and secured space with a security system and is password protected. Upon completion of the study, acceptance, and approval of the study and dissertation, all data will be deleted, and a Disk Cleanup will overwrite the data per IRB guidelines.

Epoché

This study is based on the phenomenon that some homework assignments are more effective as perceived by middle school teachers, which results in increased homework completion by students than others. Talking with middle school teachers and asking about their beliefs and perceptions is essential to this study and was not found in previous research. “The process of tapping this essence of experience and looking beyond preconceptions became known by various interchangeable terms: phenomenological reduction, epoche, or bracketing” (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p. 82).

Conclusion and Summary

This qualitative exploratory study utilized a phenomenological research design. This allowed the researcher to investigate teachers’ perceptions of the phenomenon that some homework assignments are more effective at increasing homework assignment completion than others. This was investigated through the lens of constructivist theories. Data were collected and analyzed using a descriptive focus. Middle school teachers in a suburban middle school in a region of Massachusetts known as Chesterton (a pseudonym) were selected for non-probability convenience sampling and were asked to voluntarily participate with informed consent by completing surveys, semi-structured interviews, and providing archival homework data for use by the researcher. Data from surveys, themes from interviews, and reviews of homework samples were collated and evaluated, looking for middle school teachers’ perceptions of which homework assignments contribute to increased student homework completion.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments, as perceived by middle school teachers, most effectively result in students submitting completed assignments and sought to answer the research question regarding this phenomenon of middle school teacher perceptions of homework. Data was collected using three different instruments of data collection including an online survey, distance interviews, and the analysis of submitted archival homework data samples provided by participants.

Chapter 4 presents an overview of the process used for data collection, a description of the study site and participants, and the process used for data analysis. Descriptive information was used to explain the survey and homework data and after coding or text analysis, themes that emerged from the examination of the interview data were explained. The assembled data was reviewed collectively for trends regarding homework assignments found most effective at increasing student homework assignment completion from middle school teachers' perspectives in order to attempt to answer the research question.

Per literature reviewed, teachers have reported that not all students consistently complete and turn in homework (DeSimone, 2018; Ferlazzo, 2013). Using the Constructivist Theory that promotes learning is an active process (Daniels, 2011; Gupta, 2017; McSparron, Vanka, & Smith, 2018) as a conceptual framework, this study sought to explore the phenomenon of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion as perceived by middle school teachers. This researcher looked "... to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon by collecting multiple forms of data" (Creswell, 2015, p. 469), including survey, interview, and archival homework data samples for analysis. Data collection

produced narrative, descriptive, and numerical data from middle school teacher participants which attempted to gain an understanding about homework assignments perceived as more effective at increasing student homework completion.

Research Question

The single focused research question for this study was developed to address a phenomenon that some homework assignments are more often completed by students than others, and to identify what those assignments are as perceived by middle school teachers. The research question aligns with the problem and purpose statements. The following research question was used to guide this study:

- Which homework assignments, per middle school teachers' perspectives, are most effective at increasing student homework assignment completion?

This chapter includes a brief review of the purpose, site, conceptual framework which supported the study, explanation of the study instruments, and descriptions of the site and participant group. Analysis methods were explained including details of the instruments used to conduct this qualitative study, and explanations of how the data was collected and reviewed to identify patterns and themes. Narratives, tables, and graphs were used to show data results. Finally, the emergent themes and subthemes were presented with a summary of results.

Analysis Methods

This study utilized a qualitative exploratory research method with a phenomenological research design which focused on the homework assignments most effective at increasing homework completion based upon middle school teachers' perceptions and shared lived experiences. The qualitative exploratory research method emphasized the critical aspects of the

participants' experiences and their perceptions of the effectiveness (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) of the assigned homework for middle school students.

Studying phenomena through the interpretation of lived experiences and perceptions is most effective with qualitative research methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Van Manen, 2015). This study used three instruments for the collection of qualitative data to triangulate the data "...in attempting to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. This strategy adds rigor, breadth, and depth to the study..." (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 172). This exploratory qualitative research study utilized (a) survey questions which involved subjective open and closed-ended survey questions, (b) narrative semi-structured participant interviews, and (c) archival homework data which included representative samples of homework assigned during the 2019-2020 school year with completion rates and notations made by participants that described the perceived reasoning for the rates of return by students.

An audit trail was used to capture the process of analyzing the results of the research. The researcher reported and annotated the details of data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of data. This process helped to identify the progression of thought by the researcher as data was processed and recorded. Upon reflection the researcher could critically analyze notations seeking potential preconceptions and prejudgments to reduce those researcher biases within the research process to the greatest extent possible (Statistical Solutions, 2020).

Participant Recruitment

The participant population was gathered through convenience sampling and included science and social studies teachers from the study site school known as Chesterton Middle School and were accessed via district email.

After IRB approval (Appendix I) and official permission to conduct the study was received from the superintendent of schools for the study site (Appendix H) the researcher created a video to recruit participant volunteers. This video script (Appendix G) was developed from the informed consent form and included the purpose of the study, research question, and eligibility criteria for participation. The researcher sent the video, the video script included as text within the body of an email, and a digital copy of the informed consent form (Appendix C) to each of the district email addresses of the 16 potential participants. The email explained that a follow-up email would be delivered with their personal survey link. The researcher used the REDCap website for survey data collection which generated an email with the survey link for each of the 16 potential participants.

All participants were assured of confidentiality and participant names and identifying information were deidentified with alphabetic pseudonyms for surveys and interviews and with numerical pseudonyms for each archival homework data sample during analysis. The archival homework data samples also were identified by the participant alphabetic pseudonym for assessment across data collection instruments. Participants were assured that data collected would be secured at a private, security system protected residence on a password protected computer that no one other than the researcher would or could access.

Site

The site for this study was a middle school in a small suburban region in Massachusetts (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020b), identified with the pseudonym “Chesterton.” The Chesterton region encompassed 22 communities across three counties (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020b) with public, private, and charter schools. A pseudonym of “Chesterton Middle School” was assigned

to the middle school which was the site of the study. Chesterton Middle School had been open for less than 10 years (as of 2020) and included fifth through seventh grades. Grade configuration for Chesterton Middle School was atypical but not unique in this region (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020b).

The study site used a modified version of the Next Generation Science standards adopted in 2016 and the History and Social Studies frameworks adopted in 2018 (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020a). These frameworks were adopted to "...formalize the expectation that all students in the Commonwealth have access to the same academic content, regardless of their zip code, background, or abilities" (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020a, para. 1).

Derived from portions of the district's mission and vision statements (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020b), teachers in this school and throughout the district had latitude to create and use materials to accomplish successful instruction toward those frameworks in efforts to "...continually strive to improve our practice and inspire intellectual curiosity in our students." As Hein (1991) shows regarding the Constructivist Theory, if learners are to be successful then a student must be active, engaged, and involved. A desire to engage is a crucial component to learning within the Constructivist Theory so as Forster (2011) says, completing learning-oriented homework is an important element for student success.

Survey Analysis

The recruitment video and REDCap survey links were sent separately to individual district email addresses. A survey (Appendix D) began with participants reconfirming their understanding and acceptance of the informed consent form (Appendix C) by clicking

“proceed”, and was developed and utilized questions modified from a survey previously used by the National Center for Education Statistics (2016) titled the National Household Education Survey. This survey “collects nationally representative, descriptive data on the educational activities of children and adults in the United States...every 3 years on topics including early education, family involvement in schools, homeschooling, and adult training and education” (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016, para. 1). The survey questions based upon questions from the National Household Education Survey were adapted for fit for the survey purpose of qualitative data collection and the identified research question. Further modifications to the open and closed-ended questions for the survey were made based on feedback from the field-testing group of middle school teachers uninvolved with the collected survey data and completed prior to IRB approval for use. Upon completion of the survey by the participants, an automated email from REDCap returned an additional digital copy of the informed consent for ease of access to participants, instructions for scheduling the distance interview with the researcher, and a request for three or more archival homework samples.

By providing individualized survey links for each individual participant, this allowed identifying the survey data using the same alphabetic pseudonym for each participant as the interview. Numeric pseudonyms were used for each of the archival homework data samples which included the alphabetic pseudonym of the participant to connect data across surveys, interviews, and archival homework data samples.

The researcher received 10 completed surveys; upon survey completion by 10 participants responses from the surveys were downloaded from REDCap and aggregated into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for organization of responses. An initial review of responses was completed, and the researcher looked for frequency of words, phrases, or similarities within the


responses such as grade level, subject area, and information connected to homework assigned and rates of completion among other questions, to provide a range of qualitative information to analyze. Survey questions fell into one of three types, (a) forms and methods used with homework, (b) rates of homework completion, and (c) characteristics of homework most often completed by students. Survey questions encouraged participants to explain their perceptions regarding homework completion in middle school providing narrative answers to the open-ended questions allowing review, analysis, and assessment of survey responses for commonalities and the development of core ideas across multiple survey responses.

Survey data were reviewed and assessed, and the analysis of data included (a) noting the frequency of homework assigned to students, (b) types of homework used regularly, (c) rates of return of homework assignments, and (d) how homework impacts a student's grade. The filter feature of Microsoft Excel was used to sort the rate of homework completion data and the researcher compared the provided information and sought patterns in the data. The data were reviewed to see if highest rates of homework completion had a correspondence with grade level, subject area, type of homework, frequency of homework assigned, and looked at the participants' instructional objectives for assigned homework. The data were examined to see if there were connections to rates of homework completion by students with any of the survey questions. As the survey questions contained some numerical values and some narrative data, the narrative information was clustered into groups by the researcher to identify common trends.

What is considered high, medium, or a low rate of homework completion is a subjective measure. For this study, less than a 65% rate of return by students was considered low, a 65-85% rate of return was considered average, and above 85% was considered a high rate of return.

The survey narrative data were usually words or phrases and the open-ended responses were separated into segments with each containing a single concept. This segmenting of data allowed the clustering of similar or the same responses to help “make sense out of text data, divide it into text or image, segments, label the segments...” (Creswell, 2015, p. 242). While survey data did not develop codes, the data analysis followed a similar method as that described by Creswell (2015) and developed text segments that were labeled, examined for overlap and redundancy, and collapsed into larger, similar, or related groups seeking patterns in the data. “Surveys help identify important beliefs and attitudes of individuals...” (Creswell, 2015, p. 379) and provide important information to evaluate perceptions. As the survey questions contained some numerical values and some narrative data, the narrative information analysis was performed by the researcher but not through MAXQDA as the narrative information was very brief containing only words or phrases and these very short segments of information were already structured like codes. The numerical data were assessed using the filter features of Microsoft Excel.

Surveys help with investigating and seeking to understand the lived experiences of the teacher participants (Creswell, 2015). Following a process for reviewing qualitative narrative data regarding narrative research shown in Creswell (2015), the researcher found (a) the phenomenon that some homework assignments are more likely to be completed by middle school students than others was identified, (b) the individuals who could provide information about these homework assignments were identified, (c) data were collected using surveys from those individuals that reflected “...personal and social experiences...” (p. 516).

Numerical responses were presented in the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet using formulas such as, COUNTIF(range, criteria), =AVERAGE(start:end-range), and sort a-z  to uncover

trends within the data (Microsoft, 2020). These formulas allowed the researcher ease to note high instances of responses by participants such as high incidents of similar responses for the closed-ended questions or an accounting of incidents of phrases or terms commonly used in the open-ended questions.

Interview Analysis

Interview dates and times were arranged via email and nine interviews were conducted privately; the 10th participant was unavailable after the end of the 2019-2020 school year so only survey and archival homework data was collected from this participant known as Participant J. Interviews with the participants were conducted via telephone or Google Meet at the selection of the participants; the researcher was alone in a private home office during the interviews with the door closed.

The semi-structured interview questions (Appendix E) were presented and sought information about the participants' homework assignments, instructional objectives for those assignments, and information about participants' classroom and homework procedures. The interview questions prompted discussion about middle school teachers' perceptions about what contributes to increased student homework completion. These prompts went beyond simple closed-ended questions and sought to engage the participant in a dialogue. Interviews were recorded with the participants' verbal permission using the researcher's iPhone X and the installed Rev Voice Recorder app as the recording device. Interviews were conducted using the researcher's home telephone on speaker or a laptop computer accessing Google Meet online with the audio projected through the computer speakers.

Participants were requested to submit three or more homework samples to the researcher from the 2019-2020 school year prior to the interview for discussion, but four participants did

not provide the samples prior to the interview. When samples were emailed to the researcher prior to the interview, those samples became part of the interview as details about each sample were discussed (Appendix E). This discussion allowed collection of further information about each homework sample and opened a dialogue between the researcher and the participant about the homework samples. The four participants who did not submit the archival homework data samples prior to the interview received an email for follow-up information which contained the following questions that would have otherwise been discussed in the interview (Appendix E).

- a. Why did you assign this work? (Objectives and purpose)
- b. What background information do I need to know about this assignment?
- c. Do you feel this is a rigorous assignment? Explain why or why not.

Interview transcripts were returned to participants via the participants' district email addresses for review and member-checking. Participants were asked to provide feedback regarding any changes or adjustments desired regarding their interview transcripts within five business days. None of the participants requested an adjustment to their interview transcript.

Researcher coding. After researcher and participant validation of proper transcription, transcripts were assessed by the researcher and followed Creswell's steps for coding data (2015):

1. Conduct an initial review of the text data and jot down ideas.
2. Analyze one piece of text and determine the overall meaning.
3. Begin to code the text by identifying text segments.
4. Make a list of code words and create groups based upon similarity.
5. Identify quotes that support codes.
6. Reduce the codes into major themes.

The researcher reviewed all transcripts multiple times and inserted notes on each of the transcription documents including general ideas that were repeated by more than one participant and the underlying meaning as perceived by the researcher in just a few words or phrases (Creswell, 2015; Merriam, 2009). As Creswell (2015) suggests, each transcript was read and re-read, and text segments were categorized. All the code words and phrases were listed and grouped into similar clusters and each transcript was then reviewed again to see if new codes appeared; the researcher sought specific quotes that were good representations of the identified codes (Creswell, 2015; Merriam, 2009). Thematic notes, as a means of making sense of the information and identifying the essential details, were used to potentially reveal the relevant data that connected to the literature, the conceptual framework, and the research question (Creswell, 2015). The identified codes were used to develop emergent themes concerning middle school teachers' perceptions related to the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion.

The codes and themes developed from the interviews were created regarding (a) what participants perceive as homework most effective at getting students to complete and submit the homework, (b) whether typically completed homework is rigorous, (c) whether the actions taken by the participants increased homework completion by students, and (d) participant perceived causes for students who do not typically complete homework. The emergent themes for researcher coding included (a) homework assignments that are routine such as being started in class and finished for homework, (b) hands-on homework assignments, (c) homework assigned for review needing little/no help at home, (d) homework later used in class, and (e) simple homework without multiple steps requiring executive functioning. If archival homework data

samples were brought to the interview, those data were recorded and later transferred to the archival data Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for analysis as described below.

MAXQDA coding. A student version of MAXQDA (Hughes & Radiker, 2019) was used for qualitative transcript analysis and used code-recode procedures. Code-recode procedures require that, after the researcher codes a section of data, that the researcher wait at least two weeks and then return and recode the same data and evaluate the results to create stability through repeated observation of the same data (Universal Teacher, 2019). “MAXQDA is a world-leading software package for qualitative and mixed methods research...” (Hughes & Radiker, 2019, para. 1) used to organize, analyze, and create visuals of qualitative data for research. This repeated observation allowed the researcher to use the MAXQDA processes to review and study individual transcripts which were color coded and labeled using the alphabetic name already assigned to each participant. Color coded codes were used and allowed the researcher using MAXQDA tools to “allow[s] the coding system to be displayed using a hierarchical view” (Franzosi, Doyle, McClelland, Rankin, & Vicari, 2012, p. 3238).

This process allowed the creation of five major themes which were displayed as a tree-structure (Figure 4 *MAXQDA interview theme hierarchy tree*) which also allowed sub-codes to be collapsed or opened for analysis (Hughes & Radiker, 2019). This process of coding follows the MAXQDA process of analysis, where many codes were developed and varied in their scope and relevance (Hughes & Radiker, 2019). Using MAXQDA, data was analyzed searching for themes. The emergent themes for MAXQDA coding included, (a) prescriptive homework, (b) homework that is creative or project-based, (c) homework students more likely complete due to relationship building, (d) the homework assignment’s rigor, and (e) homework assignments that considered the executive functioning of students. A benefit of the tools available within the

MAXQDA program, as applied by this researcher was the ability to use the MAXQDA visual tools tab or to export raw data into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to create specific graphs, create code matrices, code or document maps, code relations visuals, theme hierarchy trees, or document comparison visuals making the presentation of data straightforward.

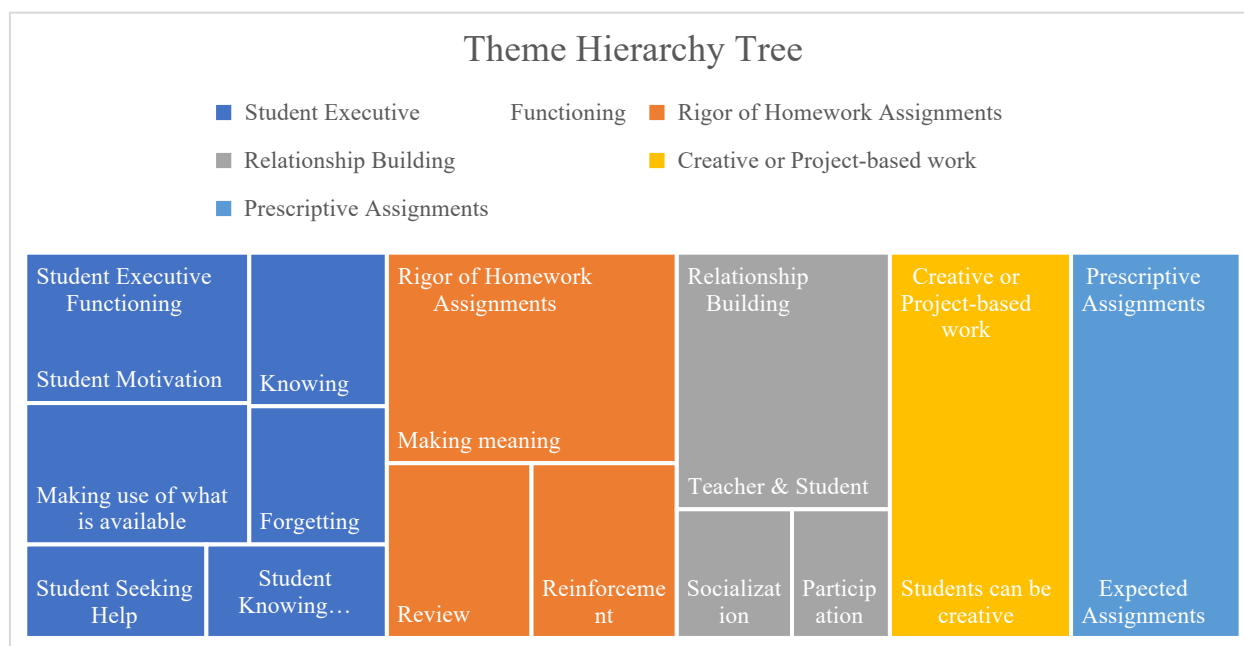


Figure 4 MAXQDA interview theme hierarchy tree

The researcher used the MAXQDA process for coding to organize the major code and sub-codes as needed (Figure 4) and is a feature of the MAXQDA program that allowed code generation, sorting, and organization into groups or sub-groups (Hughes & Radiker, 2019). As shown in Marjaei, Yazdi, and Chandrashekara, (2019), “The file is displayed as an image of all the coded segments based on the order and colors of the codes.... the investigator can directly see which topics dominate the discussion and which topics are closely related” (p. 4).

MAXQDA processes allowed for keyword counts showing the frequency of words or terms such as “executive function,” “home,” or “family” which reinforced the text coding selection by the researcher of codes and themes.

Combined researcher and MAXQDA coding. This analysis of the narrative data allowed themes that emerged through researcher coding and through MAXQDA color coding features to develop description which "...is a detailed rendering of people, places, or events in a setting in qualitative research" (Creswell, 2015, p. 246). During researcher and MAXQDA coding, the codes from the researcher and MAXQDA were reorganized and blended to form more meaningful groups which created a more logical structure (Hughes & Radiker, 2019) as a unified group of codes and themes for synchrony. Through repeated observation of the interview transcripts multiple times and coding over time, the emergence of consistent codes and interrelated themes from both sets of coding surfaced and revealed the opportunity to blend key data of the codes and emergent themes regarding participant perceptions and meaning found within the transcripts. This resulted in major themes that formed from the blending of the researcher themes and MAXQDA codes which included (a) homework assignments that are routine and prescriptive, (b) homework assignments needing family/home supports, (c) homework assignments more likely competed due to relationship building, (d) the homework assignment's rigor, and (e) homework assignments that considered the executive functioning of students. This blending of codes allowed researcher and MAXQDA codes to be combined and organized to best represent the interview data.

Archival Homework Data Analysis

Each individual archival homework data sample was assigned a numeric label to identify the specific sample along with the alphabetic pseudonym of the participant who supplied the sample for cross-referencing. The data about the sample were input by the researcher into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that organized the information provided by the participants. This

information contained the rates of return with the keywords or phrases used by participants to describe the perceived reasoning for the rates of homework assignment return by students.

Ten participants provided three or four archival homework data samples each and seven of those participants provided additional information about the supplied homework samples either during the interview or via email after the interview. All archival data contained (a) the rate of submission by students, (b) participant perceived descriptors related to homework completion, and (c) the sample of homework. The interview or follow up questions regarding the homework samples allowed the collection of additional background information that showed (a) whether many of these assignments were completed at home after being started in class, (b) the homework was completed over a period of days, (c) homework was allowed to be turned in late by students, (d) the homework assignment's rigor, (e) the homework assignment's purpose, and (f) any additional descriptors about the perceptions for the rate of return of the homework assignments by the participants. Using the lens of the Constructivist Theory framework (Daniels, 2011; Gupta, 2017), the researcher hoped this archival homework data would show the types of homework which encourage students' completion. Discussion about samples of homework might show how middle school teachers perceptions about assigned homework may have commonalities that led to homework completion by students. The researcher sought patterns in the highest rates of return by students and the descriptors provided by the participants.

After all data regarding the archival homework data samples were input into the spreadsheet, those data were sorted and filtered using the Microsoft Excel tools and then examined by the researcher. The data were examined from different perspectives such as grade level, subject area, type of homework, rigor of the assignment, type of assignment, and

homework rate of return and was sorted by the researcher from highest rate of return by students to lowest as reported by the participants. The archival homework data was also sorted by keywords and examined to identify trends related to the single focused research question. As participants had included reasons for completion as well as non-completion of homework assignments a column was labeled for reasons for lack of completion of homework. This information allowed comparison from the archival homework data to interview question number five (Appendix E), “What do you believe are the primary causes for students who do not typically complete their homework?”

An analysis of the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet containing the archival homework data was conducted using the filter and sort features of Microsoft Excel. The researcher summarized the participants perceived reasons into keywords for ease in sorting using common phrases such as “forgot” or “needed help.” This sorting and filtering allowed the researcher to view the data looking for trends in rate of return by students. The researcher also sorted and filtered the data based on the level of rigor from low to high, and type of homework assignment was alphabetized to see if there were clusters of high rates of return by students in each of those groupings. This led the researcher to draw conclusions which will be discussed in Chapter 5 and develop visuals such as tables and figures to present the data.

The types of homework assigned, the levels of rigor of the homework assignments as reported by participants, and six main categories participants perceived for the rate of homework completion were selected as topics which best provided insight into the single focused research question. The six main categories participants perceived that may have affected students rate of homework completion were (a) homework assignments done related to the student forgetting/remembered the work/materials, (b) homework assignments where students did or did

not need help at home, (c) homework assignments with varied reading or writing abilities of students, (d) homework assignments students did or did not care about, (e) homework assignments the students found interesting or not interesting, and (f) homework assignments affected by student work habits. Some of these perceptions are connected to types of homework affecting student homework completion while others relate to reasons why a student completed homework.

Presentation of Results

Survey, interview, and archival homework data were first assessed independently from each other. Data was then assessed as a collective whole including all the surveys, all the interviews, and all the archival homework data and synthesized to highlight the commonalities between the data instruments. This data analysis looked for a means of answering the single focused research question. Data were presented and examined as figures, graphs, lists of terms, matrices (in the form of spreadsheets), and tables. Data were reviewed as narrative excerpts when looking at quotes' representative of the interview codes, text segments from the surveys, and text fragments from the archival homework data samples. Data were reviewed for numerical findings from rates of incidence of responses in surveys, number of participants with common expressed ideas or terms within interviews, and number of participants and archival homework data samples with certain characteristics or numerical data provided by participants.

Survey Results

Survey data were collected from 10 participants who taught science and social studies in fifth through seventh grades at the site school who assigned homework at least once per week. There was no participation from sixth-grade social studies teachers as none of the sixth-grade social studies teachers responded to requests for participation. Questions one through three of

the survey describe subject, grade level, and years of teaching experience. There were four fifth-grade teachers, two sixth-grade teachers, three seventh-grade teachers, and one multi-grade teacher. Of the 10 participants, there were six science teachers and four social studies teachers. The participants all had four or more years of experience from which to draw their opinions; although specific questions were related to their perceptions during the 2019-2020 school year.

Participants were asked during survey question four, “How many missing assignments do you record during a typical day when homework is due? (i.e. 5 of 50)” (Appendix D). All participants responded with rates of homework that was missing by students as either a ratio or a percentage of either a single class or an entire roster of students that created difficulties in comparison. Whether a homework rate of return is considered high, average or low is subjective but for this study average is considered between 65-85% returned with no more than 35% missing. The overall baseline rate of missing homework assignments on an average night as described by these participants when homework was due was considered average.

Survey question five (Appendix D) asked participants, “During a typical academic week, how many days per week do you assign homework?” Participants H and K reported assigning homework once per week, participants D, E, G, H, and J reported assigning homework twice per week, while participants A, B and C assigned homework three times per week. It is noteworthy that participants H and K are fifth-grade teachers while A, B, and C are seventh-grade teachers indicating that more homework is assigned in the upper-grade levels and less homework is assigned in the lower-grade levels of this middle school. The frequency of homework reported by participants is less than the homework guidelines listed in the student handbook of the study site which states “Students should expect homework in each course an average of 3 to 4 times

per week for approximately 20 – 30 minutes per subject” (Appendix J). The conclusions related to this information will be further explained in Chapter 5.

Question six of the survey (Appendix D) asked, “How much time would an average student's homework for your class take on a typical evening when homework is assigned? (Assuming they used their time wisely and without distraction.)” Nine of the participants believed their homework took the average student between 15-30 minutes and participant E stated their homework would take less than 15 minutes on average. As participant H stated, “Homework Assignments that have these characteristics 1) regularly scheduled assignments with predictable output and expectations...” and participant C shared that when students know what to expect and how much work or time is involved for the assignment then that encourages completion. The conclusions related to this information will be further explained in Chapter 5.

Survey question seven (Appendix D) asked participants, “What percentage of the overall course grade does homework contribute?” and two participants, F and J, reported their homework assignments accounted for a 10th or less of a students’ overall grade. Four participants, E, G, H, and K, reported their homework assignments comprise between a 10th to a fifth of a students’ overall grade while the remaining four participants, A, B, C, and D, reported that their homework constitutes between a fifth and three-tenths of a students’ overall grade. The only pattern for the percentage that homework contributed to a student’s overall grade was by grade level as participants A, B, and C are seventh-grade teachers and have the highest percentage that homework contributed to a student’s overall grade along with Participant D who is a sixth-grade teacher. All participants assigned homework contributing to less than a third of a student’s overall grade which, when compared to similar questions during the interviews, shows

participants want homework to be important, to be completed, but do not want a student's inability to complete the assignment to destroy their grade average as stated by Participant F.

Participants reported a range of homework types for survey question eight (Appendix D), "List all the types of work you use weekly for homework..." that shows these participants typically included notebook or journal entries, vocabulary work, reading/worksheets with or without follow-up questions, review of class/preview of the next class, completing unfinished classwork, writing assignments, projects, Google questions, and studying/study guide completion which provides many different types of opportunities for students. Data from the survey regarding the types of homework assigned shows participants listed a range of specific types of homework with reading or worksheets with questions used by half of all participants with few participants using notebook or journal completion or writing assignments as homework.

Survey question nine (Appendix D) asked, "What homework assignments do you believe most contribute to students' increased homework completion?" Participants stated that assignments they perceived most contributed to homework completion (a) participants C, D, E, F, H, and J said the homework assignment had clear expectations, (b) participants C, D, E, F, and K said the assignment appeared to students to have had a high likelihood of success, (c) participants A, C, G, and J said work that appeared interesting to students, (d) participants E, D, and K said work that appeared to students to be quickly completed, (e) participants F and H said work that was regularly checked or used in class, (f) Participant B said that work started in class was helpful, and (g) Participant A said work that required little reading was beneficial.

The majority of participants, six of the 10 surveyed, perceived homework with clear expectations and ensuring students see assigned homework as achievable contributed to increased student homework completion. Participant C stated, "When students know what to

expect, When a student thinks they can be successful....” Participant D indicated, “Ease of completion. Feeling of success,” Participant E listed “Low risk...when the students understand and feel confident that they have the skills to complete the task. Short duration ... when the task requested is not going to take a very long time for them to complete.” Participant H said, “...regularly scheduled assignments with predictable output and expectations...,” and Participant J included, “Work that is at their instructional level and easily accessible as well as content that they have good knowledge on.” This directly connected to the research question regarding which homework assignments, per middle school participants’ perspectives, are most effective at increasing student homework assignment completion (Table 1). All 10 participants expressed that the rate of completion would increase if students had a personal interest in the assignment. Participants indicated that personal interest could include curiosity about the topic, students were intrigued by the assignment, or students wanted to learn/know more about the topic.

Table 1. Homework Believed to Contribute to Completion by Survey Participants

Homework Assignments Perceived by Participants to Most Contribute to Student Homework Completion
Clear Expectations
Students Believe Has High Likelihood of Success
Interesting Work
Work that Appears to be Quickly Completed
Regularly Checked/Used in Class
Work Started in Class
Work with Little Reading

For survey question 10, participants were asked (Appendix D) “What are the main objectives for student learning with homework as assigned in your class? (select 3-5).” Responses contained five main objectives (Figure 5). These instructional objectives included additional content practice or opportunities for more grades by nine participants, excluding Participant G. Objectives also included, reinforce prior learning by eight participants, excluding

participants B and J. Thirdly, objectives included transference by four participants including participants A, B, J, and K. Participants A, B, E, and G had objectives for revision of thinking. Participants D, F, G, and H had an objective which included memorization. As shown in homework objectives for student learning (Figure 5 *Survey homework objectives for students' learning*), a majority of homework assignments were for additional practice or to reinforce prior learning which appear to align with survey question nine indicating homework with clear expectations and the student belief they will have success in homework completion which would be likely with practice or reinforcement homework assignments.

Survey Objectives for Student Learning with Homework

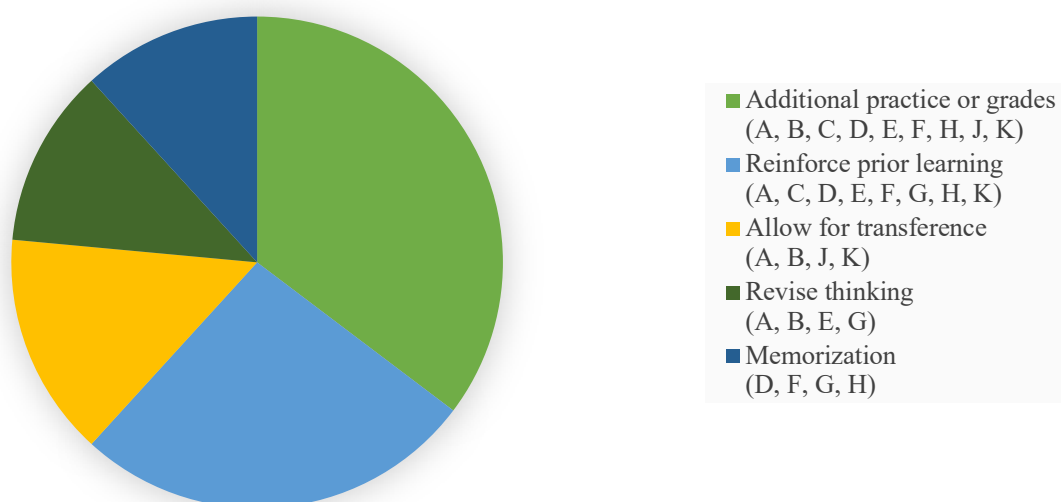


Figure 5 Survey homework objectives for students' learning

Additional responses. Creativity and access to technology were perceived by participants to have an impact on student homework completion. Six participants, A, C, E, F, G, and J, used videos or computer-based interactives such as Google Forms, BrainPOP, Quizlet, EdPuzzle, or other media which were used for homework and reported that as long as students had the computer resources to complete the work the rate of return was high.

Interview Themes

Nine participants arranged interviews with the researcher via email and completed their interview within three days of completion of their survey. One participant was unavailable after the end of the 2019-2020 school year resulting in only nine interview participants. There was no participation from sixth-grade social studies teachers as none of the sixth-grade social studies teachers responded to requests for participation. All participants used either a telephone interview or Google Meet as the platform for their distance interview.

Codes and emergent themes in participant responses provided information about participant perceptions regarding effective homework for increased student completion that consisted "...of answering the major research question and forming an in-depth understanding of the central phenomenon through description and thematic development" (Creswell, 2015, p. 246). The researcher completed coding according to Creswell's (2015) steps and later used MAXQDA to code the interview transcripts after a two-week break from the data utilizing code-recode procedures. Codes were collapsed into major themes for the researcher codes and the MAXQDA codes. The themes for each were then blended into final themes developed from the initial researcher coding and the MAXQDA coding. Five major interview themes emerged from the blending of the researcher coding and the MAXQDA coding. These themes were developed from the text segments and reinforced or were related to more than one major theme. The blended major themes included (a) homework assignments that are routine or prescriptive, (b) homework assignments and the available family/home supports, (c) homework assignments more likely completed due to relationship building, (d) homework assignments rigor, and (e) homework assignments that considered the executive functioning of students.

Participants were specifically asked in question one (Appendix E) what homework is assigned that was perceived most effective at getting students to complete and submit homework. Participant H stated that starting study guides in class and reviewing what the assignment is asking, and then allowing time for students to start their work help to make the work more routine for these assignments, (a) ensures students should not need family support, (b) ensures the level of rigor is appropriate, and (c) homework assignments that considered the executive functioning of students.

Participants C, D, and H stated they perceive homework with clear expectations to homework assignments that are routine or prescriptive where students had experience with similar assignments in the past helped students know and understand the expectations for homework assignments. Participants E, F, G, H, and K believed that completing unfinished classwork increased student homework completion because students had started the work and therefore knew what to do on the assignment or had little left to complete. Participants A, B, E, and F believed that assigned reading with follow-up questions either as homework or done the following class oftentimes were something students would avoid due to either reading difficulties, or a lack of accountability regarding whether the student had completed the reading. Participant C explained that, if an audio recording or use of a text to speech extension was available, the student's work completion rate for readings increased showing how differentiating or taking student abilities into account can affect homework completion. Regarding work that contributes to increased student homework completion Participant B stated work started in class to be completed at home where students have had classroom practice increases the homework return rate.

Interview question two (Appendix E) regarding the rigor of a homework assignment resulted in eight participants stating they perceived that homework that appeared to be too difficult might make students avoid the work. Only participant B said homework for that class was generally rigorous. If the work had been previewed in class and demonstrated as accessible and attainable then participants stated the homework completion rate would increase. Participant C expressed that more rigorous assignments were typically completed in the classroom. Participant G explained, “[The homework is] designed so that all students can access it. I think for some students it's very difficult. For other students they are able to go through it very easily.” These comments will be further explained in Chapter 5.

Interview question three (Appendix E), “What have you done, recently or in the past, to increase homework assignment completion, even if it only worked for one student?” Participants provided a variety of comments about their perceptions concerning what actions regarding homework were most effective at getting students to complete and submit their homework. Participants E, F, G, H, and K stated reviewing the work in class before assigning it as homework was beneficial at increasing homework completion. Participants C, E, F, and G stated offering extra time to complete homework assignments for individual students helped increase homework completion. Participants B, H, and K stated having a consequence often increased homework completion such as staying in from break, staying after school, or contacting parents. Participants A, B, and D stated having conversations with students to find out why homework was not being done were effective actions to increase homework completion. These approaches that the participants tried included actions taken in class before a homework assignment was given to encourage completion, offered extensions of time for students who needed it, using

positive or negative consequences, or reaching out to students to find out why the student was missing an assignment.

Interview question four (Appendix E), “What relationship do you perceive between homework completion, grades, and student success?” There was variation in teacher perceptions of homework completion and student success. Participant A said, “I’m feeling like my homework grades are mostly testing [students] on their ability to complete a routine, to complete an assignment, and bring it back in” and showed this participant believed homework was more an assessment of student skills and compliance. Participant B stated, “Homework completion has, at least in my subject, has a pretty big impact on their grades,” and Participant C declared, “I do feel if a student doesn't do homework, it drastically lowers their grade” which shows these two participants, as well as Participant D below, perceive a considerable connection between homework completion and student success. Participant D expressed that there is a relationship between homework completion and grades due to repetition and practice. Participant E and F explained they believe that homework and student success is more a reflection of good student skills and commitment to do well. Participant E said, “For me, homework completion doesn't overly impact their grades. But students who do homework, I find in general, are more successful because it shows a commitment to being a student and more buy-in into being a student.” Participant F stated students who do homework tend to do well on assessments but questioned if homework brings academic success or do academically successful students tend to do homework. Participants G and H asserted that homework and student success have a connection. Participant G explained “Those students who complete homework definitely have higher grades and are more successful.” Participant H declared “I want homework to be integral to their success, so I don't want it to be busy work, I want it to be meaningful.”

Interview question five (Appendix E), “What do you believe are the primary causes for students who do not typically complete their homework?” Four participants, B, C, D, and E stated multiple causes for students who do not typically complete their homework including a combination of social emotional issues, family issues, or lack of student dedication or motivation. Participants B, C, D, F, and K stated a lack of parental involvement or lack of support at home. Participants B, E, and K said there were no consequences for not completing work. Participant B said:

When [parents] get notified that their child doesn't do their homework, they don't respond. To me, that seems to be one of the bigger issues. The students also know in our district that they're going to be promoted to the next grade, no matter how well they do or don't do. So, there's not really a consequence other than potentially failing a class, which doesn't go on their transcript and they are allowed to move forward to the next grade.

Participant B further alleged that the student disengagement impacted classwork as well. Participants A, E, and H said the executive functioning of students impacted the ability of a student to remember, know how, and complete an assignment on their own. Participant H explained home support is a major cause for homework incompleteness, but that student habits and executive functioning are contributing factors as well. Participants, C and E listed that students were overscheduled and did not have the time or ability to balance those after school activities with homework requirements.

Interview question six and seven (Appendix E), “Think of two students who have been resistant toward completing homework who you were able to get to complete some or more homework; we will call them student A and B. What seemed to increase homework assignment completion for...” each student? These two students remained unidentified and participants

discussed their perceptions of what increased homework completion for those specific students who had previously struggled with homework completion. This encouraged participants to consider specific examples of what was effective at increasing student homework completion which directly relates to the research question. Participants offered a range of possible interventions including offering extra help or time for homework completion, contacting parents, speaking directly with the student, using an intervention model to create a success plan, or enlisting the assistance of another staff member in the school. Eight of the nine participants, excluding Participant H, listed offering extra help or time for the student to complete the assigned work which might have included modified work or added word banks. Participant C declared, “staying after with me and getting that one-on-one connection and clarification I found was really helpful.” Participants, B, D, F, G, and K listed contacting parents about the students’ missing homework increased homework completion. Participant G expressed, “having that communication with the parent and having [the student] stay after school, I think, [assisted students toward] completed the homework.” Five participants, A, B, C, D, and F listed speaking with the student led to increased homework completion. Participant A asserted, “...giving them feedback about it and saying like, ‘wow, that was really wonderful how you turned that in. I’m so proud of you, you got to keep going and doing that again.’”

Three participants, D, E, and G stated using a Response To Intervention (RTI) model improved student homework completion. “Response to Intervention (RTI) and is a multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs” (Gorski, 2020, para. 1). Participant G stated, “This year we had a block in the fifth-grade schedule called WIN [What I Need]. And we would target and group students who we knew needed help in certain areas and we would work on things then.” Per Gorski (2020) during RTI

a teacher would identify a struggling learner, provide increasing levels of support, monitor progress, and make decisions about adjustments to the supports. Participants, D and E who are both sixth-grade science teachers found that having the students work with a special educator or another educator in the building benefited the student in homework completion. Participant D said, "...talking with a special educator about the student, we both could help that student, whether it was the para, myself, or the special educator. So more of a team approach to completing homework assignments."

The final interview questions eight and nine (Appendix E) were regarding the archival homework samples if provided prior to the interviews and are presented in the archival homework sample data section. Question eight asked participants to:

Email three or more samples of homework assigned this school year with completion rates, as a ratio or percentage, with key word or phrases you believe describe your reasoning for the rates of return by students. Those homework samples may be submitted at a later date if needed as well.

Question nine posed questions about the archival samples if they had already been submitted including:

For each sample discuss the following... (a) Why did you assign this work? (Objectives and purpose) (b) What background information do I need to know about this assignment? (c) Was it begun in class and finished for homework? (d) Was it assigned and given a later due date? Etc. (e) Do you feel this is a rigorous assignment? Explain why or why not. (f) What was the rate of completion? (g) What were the reasons given by some students for not completing the work, if any? (h) Do you believe there were other reasons involved in work non-completion? Explain.

Participant's awareness of the executive function of students. Nearly a third of the identified text segments from interview responses were related to the executive functioning of students. All nine interview participants perceived the executive functioning of students as the major factor that was most effective at increasing homework completion. Executive Function is defined as, "The cognitive process that encompasses an individual's ability to organize thoughts and activities, prioritize tasks, manage time efficiently, and make decisions" (Executive Function, 2009, para. 1). Participant G stated that their team of teachers worked to support executive functioning for individual students as needed "...as a team we would prioritize and do that executive functioning for the student." Within the executive functioning theme there were subthemes that emerged which included (a) homework assignments where there was student motivation to do well, (b) homework assignments where students sought help as needed which included knowing when the student needed help or not, (c) homework assignments where students knowing or forgetting what to do, and (d) homework assignments where students making use of available supports or not.

Student motivation to do well. Participants perceived students' desire to do well reflected the inclusion of hands-on activities and activities that are high interest. Participant A stated, "...something about that topic made it where he wanted to actually learn. There was a piece of that, of the passion behind the topic." Also, Participant C said that having goals created motivation within that student when Participant C said:

I think a lot of it is some intrinsic motivation. Student B decided to find, through talking and then through updating Aspen regularly, student B has a goal to go to [the local vocational high school] and student B realized that seventh-grade grades were important. So, he had a grade he wanted to maintain.

Students seeking help or knowing when to seek help. Participant E and F stated that some students do not recognize when they need assistance. Participant F would provide strategies to assist students in homework completion such as, filling in as much as the student could independently and then using notes to help. Participant K declared some students did not know when they needed help, “They would think that they were all set, that they had already done their best work, and many of them never even would look at the checklist” showing students in middle school may need more homework assignments that considered the executive functioning of students to provide support for them.

Students know what to do or forget what to do. Keeping a digital or paper agenda is an expectation for many students in this middle school. All participants except for B reported issues with students remembering what the assignment was, remembering to do an assignment, or remembering to bring home the needed materials. Participant A believed the technology available was a distraction, “I personally blame Chromebooks a little bit. That's kind of my perspective. I think a lot of times they're so focused on that, as opposed to all the pieces that they need.” Having the executive function skills to self-monitor is a problem as explained by Participant C, “they forget they have homework; they forget where they wrote it down.”

Students using the supports that are available to them. Participant A explained that students may feel overwhelmed and may just look for answers rather than really absorbing the material. Participant C explained that with provided audio files or Google Extensions for text to speech many students were able to access readings. Participant C also said, “despite the supports we do give them... once they're home, they don't know how to start.” The challenge for middle school students is knowing how to access and use the available supports. The students need specific training on how to use available supports (Participant K).

Rigor of homework assignments. The second major interview emergent theme included the rigor of the assignment; this included how hard an assignment might “look” to a student and how that student’s opinion of the difficulty of the assignment affected whether the student would attempt it. Nearly a quarter of coded text segments mentioned the rigor of the assignment. “Promoting rigor in the classroom requires expectations and experiences that are academically, intellectually, and personally challenging” (Christenson, 2017, para. 1) and has been a goal within education for more than 10 years (Christenson, 2017). Participant K said the expectation is that homework should be able to be completed by all students, so it was not considered particularly rigorous. Participant F said, “I would consider rigorous to be more of application where the students would be applying something or looking for connections with the home environment, to what they're learning in class. And those assignments typically had lower completion rates.” Participant E stated, “telling kids that specifically I will be available at this time to work on this assignment has increased the level of participation in more rigorous tasks” and explained that without that specific support more rigorous tasks were often left incomplete.

During interviews participants stated that if an assignment (a) looked hard, (b) had too much reading, (c) looked like it was going to take a lot of time or a lot of work, (d) students reached a point where they did not know what to do then students would disengage and not complete the assignment. Participant B asserted that regarding reading assignments that reading the assignment in class and having students finish the reading and/or questions for homework would increase the return rate.

All participants stressed that they perceived some methods to increase student homework completion of more rigorous homework assignments which included (a) making an assignment look visually appealing to students, (b) homework assignments that limit or scaffold reading, or

(c) homework assignments where teachers encourage students to skip a portion of an assignment they could not complete but do as much of the rest of the assignment as they could. Within the major theme of rigor of homework assignments subthemes emerged that included (a) homework assignments for review and reinforcement of previous learning or (b) homework that was a challenge to make meaning of content.

Assignments for review or reinforcement. Participants felt that homework assignments that involved review or reinforcement were more likely to be completed than homework assignments that involved higher order thinking skills. Participant A said, “I feel like I tend to do the critical thinking piece more in class and kind of help them through the critical thinking in class.” Participant B was the only participant who felt their homework was rigorous and there are synthesis skills involved in homework assignments for that class. All other participants believed that homework assignments were more along the knowledge or comprehension level. For example, Participant D said, homework with high rates of completion included, “Anything that reviews what we've covered in class that day.” Participant E said, “I find that review assignments are most effective versus launch assignments because they're more likely to do stuff when they think that they are going to be successful.” Participant F stated, “I would consider rigorous to be more of application where the students would be applying something or looking for connections with the home environment, to what they're learning in class. And those assignments typically had lower completion rates.” Participant G explained that review along with other types of assignments were used, “So really trying to hit upon different ways of learning information, but to review it at the same time,” which could be used to stretch students’ thinking. Participant K expressed that homework assignments are “...meant to reinforce everything that they've been doing in class for a certain period of time.”

Homework Making-Meaning of Content. Participants often stated that the meaning of the content was for basic levels of thinking including creating a knowledge base or explaining an experience, understanding or attitude rather than analysis, inferencing, evaluation, interpretation, or reasoning. Participant E asserted that homework assignments might include, “understanding of the difference between an observation and a claim.” Participant F declared, “we would use sentence frames quite a bit in class because from what I've been told, they haven't really done a lot of combining evidence to support a claim in elementary years.”

Relationship building. During interviews relationship building was a major theme mentioned by participants and was meant to describe the teacher and student relationship but also included socialization and participation in activities with peers. Participants A and B declared that relationships were important for socialization and making connections with others and were especially important at the middle school level. Subthemes emerged that included (a) homework assignments that encouraged relationship building between the teacher and the student by all participants, or (b) homework assignments that encouraged engagement between student peers.

Relationship building between the teacher and the student. The teacher to student relationship building mentioned by participants included having teachers check in with students who were missing an assignment, a teacher reaching out to encourage a student, or as participant B said, “rather than being reactionary, trying to be proactive and trying to be probative and find out what's going on with a student.” This same participant stated this led to measures taken by the participant to support the student with extra time, help, or adjustments to assignments. Other teacher to student relationship building involved positive reinforcement for completed assignments including pep talks that the teacher believed in the student or offered one on one help from the teacher after school or during other available times. Regarding teacher and student

relationship building, Participant D said, “if the student had success in the class and I praised that success, it made him more willing to do more work in the class. So, it was a relationship.”

Relationships between student peers. Another reported form of relationship building was between student peers. Seven of nine participants excluding participants D and E said during the interviews that opportunities to work with a peer, or having a peer rely on the student created a sense of responsibility to complete the assigned homework because others were depending upon the student to do their part. When students needed to complete homework in order to engage with peers or participate in subsequent lessons then students were also more likely to complete homework. Regarding opportunities to be social and interact with peers, Participant H said students coming prepared with group homework offers opportunities to be social and participate in class but without the homework the student misses out on both. Participant A expressed that students who had not completed an assignment might feel left out of classroom conversations and discussions; this participant further said feeling left out of a class discussion often leads to increased homework completion in the near term for many students.

Available Family/Home Supports. A fourth major emergent interview theme involved available family and home support and whether there was or was not the ability for students to receive help in completing assigned homework at home. Family or home support was mentioned by eight of the nine participants excluding participant A and was the only major theme not mentioned during all nine interviews. This fact was not recognized until interview transcripts were assessed so it was not a specific question that was asked of the participant. Participant A did talk about work completed at home, but the comment was simply about completing a homework assignment at home and did not reference support at home. Participant B stated that “...contacting parents is pretty effective for a lot of our students” in response to how to

encourage increased homework assignment completion. Participant C alleged that the arrangement of the home environment can influence if homework is completed or not; “I think when [students] get home, sometimes it depends on the structure of their home environment” and whether there is a specific space or expectation for students to complete their homework.

Participant F asserted that just having parents check to see if homework is complete can increase homework completion, “another thing that sometimes helps with homework completion is to get [students] in the habit of, at least for certain types of assignments, get a parent's signature or just a parent check off, that it's been checked” as a motivator to complete the assignment without putting pressure on the parents to check the homework assignment for accuracy.

Six participants C, E, F, G, H, and K stressed that available home or family support is not within the control of the student and that participants felt that lack of completed work or resultant poor grades should not count against the student or their family for student grades. This will be further examined in Chapter 5.

Routine/Prescriptive assignments. The final major emergent interview theme surfaced around when participants provided routine or prescriptive homework for students. This allowed students to predict what homework was due, when homework was due, and to predict based upon past routines how to do an assignment, where the students already knew and understood the expectations of specific homework assignments. Participant A explained, “[Students] having routine of, I'm going to get home, I'm going to do this for this class, and then I'm going to turn it in.” leads to increased homework completion. Participant A further alleged, “my homework grades are mostly testing [students] on their ability to complete a routine, to complete an assignment, and bring it back in.” Participant C declared, “The chapters were given in audio and then sentence starters were given and then throughout the year samples were shown what

students had completed. So, I think it was very...it was routine” which the participant perceived as contributing to increased homework completion. This reinforces the need for routine or prescriptive homework assignments, even across subject areas was perceived by participants to increase homework completion by middle school students. Participant F said that routine assignments are a benefit for some students while others can manage less routine homework and prefer the flexibility. This shows some variance in middle school student needs as perceived by these participants regarding routine homework assignments and how these participants are aware of the developmental needs and executive functioning for scheduling of their students homework assignments and modify the approach to homework based on the individual group of students they serve.

Archival Homework Data Trends

Archival homework data samples were provided by 10 participants with a total of 32 homework samples reviewed by the researcher. Some samples had additional information provided by participants during interviews or via email. There was no participation from sixth grade-social studies teachers as none of the sixth-grade social studies teachers responded to requests for participation. There was participation from science teachers in grades five through seven and from fifth and seventh-grade social studies teachers as well as a multi-grade level social studies teacher. Data about each sample were input into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and eight participants provided three samples each and two participants provided four samples each. Each archival sample was given a numeric identifier which also included the alphabetic identifier used for participants to connect the participants across all three data collection instruments. Archival homework data samples discussed during interviews or in follow-up

emails had additional information that was provided and enriched the amount of available information for some of the samples that was also input into the spreadsheet.

The research question focused on perceptions of middle school teachers regarding homework that is effective at increasing student homework assignment completion. Participants were asked to "...email three or more samples of homework assigned this school year with completion rates, as a ratio or percentage, with keyword or phrases you believe describe your reasoning for the rates of return by students" (Appendix E). Participants provided a mixture of reasons they believed caused students not to complete the assigned homework as well as what they perceived led to the high rate of return for the homework assignments provided. Whether a homework rate of return is considered high, average or low is subjective, but for this study average is considered between 65-85% returned. This data was analyzed across grade levels, subject areas, homework completion rate, homework types submitted, rigor of assignments, and homework rate of return (Table 2).

Table 2. Archival Homework Data Summary

Archival Data Summary	Homework Assignment Types	Rates of Completion	Keywords/Phrases Noted by Participants
5 th grade science	Reading/Worksheets with Questions Study Guides Writing Assignments	Average	Could not find it/ Forgot Family support issues General avoidance May not do unless teacher talks with them Poor student habits
5 th grade Social Studies	Notebook/Journal Reading/Worksheets Reflections Study Guides	Low, nearly average	Did not care/Forgot Needed help at home Student thought it was done Very engaging assignment
6 th grade science	Reading/Worksheets with Questions Reflections Study Guides Writing Assignments	Average	Difficulty with writing Felt doable by the student Reading was a factor Needs lots of scaffolds to attempt Review of what we did in class Situations at home/Forgot
6 th grade Social Studies	No participation	Not reported	Not Applicable

7 th grade science	Projects Reading/Worksheets Reflections	Average	Creative assignment Interesting assignment Needed help at home
7 th grade Social Studies	Projects Reading/Worksheets with Questions Study Guides	Average	Lack of importance placed on school No long-term consequences No one check at home Questions were brief Scared by the reading Something they were familiar with Topic was intriguing
Multi-grade Social Studies	Reading/Worksheets with Questions	Average, nearly below average	Needed help from teacher Scaffolded work Felt doable by the student Reading was a factor

Grade level data. Grade level archival homework data were collected from grades five, six, and seven. Grade five work was submitted by science and social studies participants and had a variety of homework assignment types which included half of all assignments designated as easy by the reporting teachers. In fifth grade, all but one of the participants said homework is often incomplete classwork, and all but one participant allowed work to be turned in late or resubmitted for increased credit. Four of the five key phrases about the assignments explained reasons students did not complete the work although all the comments voiced by the fifth-grade science teachers were about avoidance behaviors or difficulties experienced by students. For example, Participant F explained that students, “could not find it” or “gave up on portions” while Participants F and G said students forgot. This appears to show that in fifth grade for both science and social studies that incomplete homework assignments are more often about reasons for incompleteness such as a lack of proper homework routines, lack of assistance at home, or student avoidance rather than difficulty of the homework assignment despite opportunities for students to submit work late or resubmit as desired.

Less than a quarter of all sixth-grade homework assignments submitted were labeled by the participants as having little rigor. Participants explained that the archival homework data

samples were often started in class to ensure understanding of what to do. As Participant E said, students “previewed it in class just to sort of go through where they could look for the information.” Sixth-grade work was only submitted by science teachers as no participants from the social studies department elected to engage. In sixth grade, it appears that the perceived level of rigor is higher than fifth grade for homework assignments but that participants make efforts to ensure students understand the expectations and are able to complete the assignments at home. For example, Participant E explained, “Both of these assignments [sample 12 and 13] were a review of what we did in class that particular day” and made sure students had the content knowledge to complete the homework assignment.

Seventh-grade archival homework data was submitted by science and social studies participants. A quarter of the homework assignments were reported as having high rigor and only one homework assignment was rated as having low rigor. The remaining assignments were rated as having average rigor by the participants. Seventh-grade teacher participants mentioned academic supports for students such as provided highlighted text for students to indicate content of the highest importance, sentence starters, graphic organizers, exemplars, and chunking of homework assignments into manageable tasks for students. Participant A asserted, “[this assignment was] broke[n] into parts leading up to the test. The kids had to complete two sections each night” which shows that participants perceive supports such as review, scheduling, and chunking of homework as beneficial at increasing student homework completion. Participant C said supports that assisted students in homework completion included, “Graphic Organizer[s] shared to gather ideas. Time given in class to start and ask questions. Exemplars shared.” Participants appear to assess the needs of the students in their classes and provide the supports

necessary to assist those students in being able to complete given homework assignments with a gradual release of responsibility as the school year progresses as stated by Participant B.

Subject area. Within the subject area of science, a third of all archival homework data samples were study guides and another third of the samples were reading/worksheets with questions. The remaining third were a mixture of writing assignments, reflections, or projects. Fifth and seventh-grade science participants had the highest rate of return by students and seventh-grade science participants revealed that most of their comments about student homework completion involved why a student would complete a homework assignment rather than what prevented a student's completion of that homework assignment. There were only four assignments with a completion rate considered low, within the parameters of this study, by the participants for the science area. Within the science area, participants perceived homework assignments that were creative, or allowed the use of art or drawing which participants perceived increased student homework completion for nearly half of all submitted archival homework samples. Here, participants included supports to help assist students with science homework completion such as Participant H providing extended time, or Participant G allowing late or resubmitted work which places a focus on learning rather than task completion.

The archival homework data samples for social studies had reading/worksheets with questions listed over half the time and projects listed nearly as often. The lowest rate of return was for social studies assignments. Nearly half the time participants labeled these homework samples as having a lot of reading that caused difficulty or that students needed help completing the homework assignment because of reading or writing difficulties. Supports were provided by social studies participants including extended time to complete work, allowing corrections to improve grades, or as Participant A said, "I modeled in class what [homework] would look like,

though I'm realizing now I should have an example listed on the actual assignment. I broke this up into sections as well.”

Homework types submitted. The types of archival homework data samples provided by the 10 participants included reflections on activities done in class during the school day, writing assignments, work on projects, completion of study guides, and reading/worksheets with follow-up questions. Many of the assignments did not require higher-order thinking skills or a synthesis of information and were more about locating facts, reiterating facts, or presentation of facts.

Rigor of homework assignments. All 10 participants reported the level of rigor of archival homework data samples for the 32 assignments with only seven samples reported as having high rigor, 15 samples having medium or average rigor, and 10 samples having little or low rigor. Rigor “...is widely used by educators to describe instruction, schoolwork, learning experiences, and educational expectations that are academically, intellectually, and personally challenging” (Rigor, 2014, para. 1). The participants, A, B, C, E, and F who submitted the assignments rated as having high rigor stated that those had more rigor for the portions begun in class and less rigor for the portions completed at home.

Half of the participants, E, F, G, H, and K reported that if the assignment seemed too easy to the student, the participants believed students often thought they had finished the assignment already as Participant K said, “they thought they were all set”, forgot they had to do it by Participants F, G, and H, or believed they could quickly finish it at another time but as Participant J provided information about the provided homework samples via email that the student in fact, “needed help” which resulted in missing homework assignments that were rated as having little rigor. Of the 10 archival homework assignments with the highest rates of return only three of those assignments had little rigor, with six assignments having medium rigor, and

one had high rigor. Of the 10 assignments with the lowest submission rates still only three had a rating of little rigor, five had a rating of medium rigor and only two had high rigor. This distribution of rigor was nearly the same for homework assignments with low rates of return as the highest rates of return for homework assignments.

Homework rate of return. Nearly all of the 32 archival homework data samples had a completion and return rate reported by participants as average or better where for this study average is considered between 65-85% returned. There was one assignment which was an outlier with a student homework completion rate of less than a tenth. Sample 25, the outlier, was listed as an easy assignment, but Participant K stated that students “don’t care to improve their grade.” For the homework assignment adding, “These are also engaging and very straightforward.” For those homework samples with the highest return rate phrases like “forgot” were used by participants H and K, “students enjoy coloring” and “creative assignment” by Participant C, “interesting assignment” by Participant H, and home support (as a positive factor) by participants E and H.

The overall rate of return for homework assignments was within the average range for the 32 assignments but participants shared information about rates of return in ways that made comparisons difficult. Responses provided by participants about their perceptions regarding reasons why homework was or was not done by students revealed six major themes that may have affected the student’s completion of their homework. These major themes as volunteered by participants about their perceptions regarding archival homework data samples included (a) homework assignments where students forgot/remembered the work/materials, (b) homework did or did not need help at home, (c) homework assignments with a mismatch of the reading or writing abilities of students, (d) homework assignments students did or did not care about, (e) the

homework students found interesting or not interesting, and (f) homework assignments using positive student habits.

Of the 32 provided archival homework data samples nearly half had teacher comments including more than one reason for completion/lack of completion showing there can be multiple factors which can affect a student's homework return rate. All 32 samples had at least one positive factor which contributed to the return of homework by students. As participants had included reasons for completion and non-completion of homework assignments a column was labeled in the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for reasons for lack of completion of homework. This information allowed comparison to interview question number five (Appendix E). Half of all samples provided by participants showed that students forgetting or remembering to do an assignment was a major factor contributing to homework being done or not.

Forgot/Remembered the work/materials. The most prevalent reason participants listed regarding the archival homework data related to students completed homework assignments was the student forgetting or remembering they had homework to do or the student forgot the needed materials which affected half of the samples. Forgetting materials included leaving a needed notebook or resource at school which could not be accessed online. Students using an agenda/planner was seen as effective at increasing student work completion although for sample 31, Participant A said a digital agenda was not helpful at increasing homework completion. Participant F mentioned that students, "did not have materials" and could not do an assignment at home. Participant G stated that students "did not know it was due" which might be rectified using a digital agenda with reminders. Participant D alleged "students who do not feel successful writing 'forget' to do the assignment" which could potentially be remedied by offering writing supports. Regarding study guides, Participant A asserted that, "kids tend to be

more passive about studying” and so may skip completing a study guide if it is ungraded or only checked for completion. Participant G stated students were provided access to completed study guides before the assessment to ensure students were not studying incorrect information but that some students would not complete the study guide because they knew they would get a corrected one in time to study for the assessment.

Did/Did not need help at home. The second most prevalent reason participants perceived impacting student homework submission was student’s ability to complete the assignment independently or needing support at home. All of the participants stated that many content resources can be found online for students to access while at home in order to assist students who might need help while at home. Eight of the 10 participants who submitted archival homework data samples stated students often used available online resources from home showing the student needed help but provided resources filled that need. Sample 13, provided by Participant E, had the comment that a student may have “situations outside of school that I can’t really control or support.” Participant F stated that students “gave up on portions” when they could not complete the homework on their own. Participant J stated some students “handed in [the assignment] but required help from [the] teacher” because the student could not complete the assignment on their own at home. A lack of parental questioning at home may explain how home supports are perceived by participants B and F to impact student homework completion. As Participant B said, “no one to check or ask at home” and “lack of importance placed on education” by families as factors increased the lack of completion of homework by students.

Reading/writing abilities. The third reason participants perceived had an influence on homework completion was the reading or writing abilities necessary to complete a homework assignment and was mentioned by participants for nearly a third of the samples. When

homework samples were provided prior to the interviews, the specific samples were discussed during the interviews. Three participants, A, B, and C who are all seventh-grade teachers said they created graphic organizers, sentence starters, and concept maps to help with writing; participants claimed when these writing supports were provided the rate of homework return was improved. Three participants, A, C, and E mentioned if a reading assignment was long students would “have trouble finding the patience to read everything and not [read it, but would] just look for the answer” as Participant A said or might just skip the reading and not attempt the assignment at all. Participant C shared that an audio recording or text to speech application were made or available for longer reading assignments which improved student completion of related questions. Participant C also said providing “Interesting assignment[s], applying knowledge in a unique way” increased the likelihood that a student would use the reading supports available to them. Participant D stated that “even when given a word bank” students would often skip assignments which required a lot of reading or writing.

Did/Did not care. The fourth most prevalent reason participants listed affecting students completion of homework assignments, as discussed when reviewing archival data were that some students are very outcome oriented as stated by Participant H, and would work for completion, or some students said they did not care or gave up on the assignment as stated by Participant F. Participant F said students would more often complete an online assignment if the student’s teacher could see what was done on the assignment and when the student was logged in to work on the assignment such as through a Google Doc. This was also discussed in the interview with Participant F and the accountability of being able to tell a student the teacher can see that the student was logged into a Google Doc for a certain number of minutes often prompted students to put forth more effort or ask more questions seeking assistance. If

homework samples were provided prior to the interviews then participants were specifically asked, “What were the reasons given by some students for not completing the work, if any? Do you believe there were other reasons involved in work non-completion? Explain.” Participant E said some students were “apprehensive to fill in the [Google] form thinking that they would be judged as if it were a quiz” which made some students give up. This seemed contradictory to what Participant E believed a student would do on an assessment, but the participant explained that students would follow up and ask for help later which led to late assignments. Participant H stated students would often complete only enough work to be able to say the work was done, not for accuracy or a high score or grade. Participant F said, some students, “gave up on portions” and further explained that students would stop when they reached a portion they could not do rather than skipping that section and moving on to portions of the assignment the student could do.

Interesting or uninteresting work. The fifth reason participants perceived impacted assigned homework completion was students found the work to be either interesting or uninteresting. Participant C mentioned homework with high rates of return was due primarily to the interesting nature of the assignment and stated that sample 20 was an, “Interesting assignment, applying knowledge in a unique way” such as with projects was a big stimulus for students to begin, persevere, and complete homework. Participant A stated students would often complete work they found intriguing. Participant A asserted for sample 31, “The simulation was fun for the kids, as they got to act out different historical figures. We did the work and learned in class, then they read more in depth about the topic that evening.” An assignment related to a topic the students had already been intrigued with in the classroom seemed to encourage students to do the follow-up homework due to a high level of interest.

Student habits. The final major reason participants proposed impacted students completing a homework assignment was students did or did not have proper student habits. Student habits are generally meant to mean how students “plan, monitor, and regulate their learning” (McMillan, 2010, p. 8) which would include work avoidance. With proper student habits a student would be able to see what parts of an assignment need to be done and in what sequence, examine whether they are making adequate progress, or need help. Participant H stated that, “good student habits” increased homework completion for homework sample eight. Participant E listed that there were “kids who didn't complete that [archival sample 13] who never completed homework the rest of the year.” The reason for continued homework avoidance by those students were not stated. Participant K stated, “[students] thought they were all set” for assignment number 24 which was a notebook check with a reflection form and was related to students overall “work habits.”

Individual Participant Perceptions Across the Data

Participant A

Participant A is a seventh-grade social studies teacher. Overall, Participant A perceived homework with clear expectations, interesting work, executive functioning of students, relationship building, routine/prescriptive assignments, students remembering their homework, reading and writing abilities of students, and student habits as the key factors to increase student homework completion.

Participant A indicated in the survey “the less reading, the more assignments I receive. The more ‘out of the box’ the assignment, the more I receive (i.e. a fun activity like a poster, watching the news, interviewing someone)” which is also related to the interesting nature of the homework assignments from the archival homework samples. Participant A tended to use

project-based learning in this classroom and during the interview shared many of the interesting tasks and units completed in this class. This same participant believes a lack of organization is a contributing factor affecting student homework completion and that improving good student skills overall would benefit all learners.

These comments connect strongly with the executive functioning of students and the routine nature of some assignments. Participant A also stated that teacher to student relationships were vitally important saying, “once they get on a streak, and you encourage them, they sometimes they can blossom” showing how sincere encouragement from a teacher with whom a relationship has been forged can make a difference. The interview included a discussion of how the participant would engage with students and build that rapport in order to solidify the relationship which led to increased student homework assignment completion. Finally, during the interview, this participant said homework completion increases when students can be creative, complete hands-on activities, and make use of teacher provided supports. The supports were further mentioned with the homework samples regarding scaffolding and executive functioning. This participant said students had a “higher rate of return because the topic intrigued the kids” and that a combination of factors is needed to increase student homework completion.

Participant B

Participant B is a seventh-grade social studies teacher. This participant was the only participant to talk about how homework for this social studies class is considered rigorous but also talked about the techniques used now and in the past to encourage increased homework submission by students which included Zeroes Aren't Permitted and having students stay in from break or after school. Participant B expressed strongly that homework completion for this class

is important and that students who do not complete homework are at a distinct disadvantage to their peers regarding grades and classroom success. Data collected to answer the research question indicated this participant's responses during the survey and the interview that homework assignments that are most effective at increasing student homework assignment completion include those started in class and finished for homework as this ensured students knew what to do on the assignment and knew how much work was left to complete. Participant B indicated during the survey that work started in class and finished for homework helped students as the students knew what to do as they had practiced in class and had some of the work already completed. This same participant was adamant that homework needed to be completed and that perhaps a study hall would be a benefit for those kids who need more support.

During the interview, Participant B also stated having students stay in for break or after school showed that consequences are effective at increasing homework completion. Unfortunately, Participant B said those consequences can impact the student in other ways such as damaging the teacher and student relationship, reducing the opportunity for a movement break if the student cannot run around at break time, or affect the student's mood for the remainder of the day affecting other classes as well. Contacting parents was seen as a punitive action which was successful but might also bring about less trust on the part of the student. Using rewards or positive situations encouraged homework production for one student when this participant partnered a struggling student with a desired peer partner who was also a good peer model. This participant believed this action would actually strengthen the teacher to student relationship if properly used.

Participant B also sees student apathy where "it's just choosing not to do homework" as a factor which may not be impacted by relationship building, parent/home support, or other

interventions due to as this participant indicated regarding archival homework, there is no consequence for failing so some students do not see a point in doing the work if it does not count. Participant B perceived completing unfinished classwork as homework, relationship building, available family/home support, and reducing student apathy as the key factors to increase student homework completion.

Participant C

Participant C is a seventh-grade science teacher. Participant C perceived homework with clear expectations, highly attainable work, interesting work, executive functioning of students, relationship building, and routine/prescriptive assignments as the key factors to increase student homework completion. This participant explained that this school year has been particularly challenging with the range of English Language Learners and varied cognitive abilities in this participant's science classroom.

Homework assignments that are routine with clear expectations also benefits students in this participant's class, "I think when they know what to expect is also something that I think the completion rates go up." This participant believes in using project-based learning and those related homework assignments had high rates of return due to students being "invested and find it interesting. I think art projects linked with science have a high rate of completion." So, there are a variety of factors which impact student homework completion. Participant C believed finding the right balance in completing work well without being over-burdened by the amount or types of homework assignments is often a difficulty for this age level and help with that executive functioning is often necessary. "I wish there was a magical way we could really help them with that executive functioning and how we could support them to take what they do in the classroom and bring that home for them." Just speaking with the student, and pointing out the

participant noticed missing homework also has had an impact; “Hey, I haven't seen homework in a while.... And that has helped more than I thought it would help actually.” This participant feels that students will generally try to complete an assignment particularly if the assignment is creative or interesting such as “project based that has art mixed with science, and I know that if students are very much invested in it...” Participant C offers many academic supports to assist students find success such as exemplars, graphic organizers, audio files for readings among others and said using “interesting assignment, applying knowledge in a unique way” would increase student buy-in.

Participant D

Participant D is a sixth-grade science teacher. In response to the interview question, Participant D perceives homework assignments which are most effective at increasing student homework completion are supported by the team of teachers, including special education staff, and homework that students see as achievable with supports available to help with reading or writing difficulties that students experience. Participant D noted during the survey that “Ease of completion” and “Feeling of success” were the major contributors to increased student homework completion which might include homework assignments that are routine, that the student could complete on their own without parent or home supports as important to increase student homework completion.

During the interview, Participant D said using a team approach and working with other adults helped some students with homework completion. This would include using a paraeducator, special education teachers, or fellow teaching team members. Offering scaffolds that students can access at home is a major contributor to increased homework completion, “I give word banks or sentence starters. That seems to help a lot, because sometimes kids don't

know where to start.” Also, teacher and student relationships can promote increased student homework completion, “[if a student had] success in the class and I praised that success, it made him more willing to do more work in the class. So, it was a relationship.” Participant D stated in the interview they did not know how to overcome the lack of interest or “laziness” on the part of students who are capable but choose not to engage.

This participant believed writing was a big obstacle for some students and using homework assignments that are routine helps improve student completion but, “students who do not feel successful writing ‘forget’ to do the assignment” even when given scaffolds and word banks. Participant D perceived highly attainable work, interesting work, level of rigor, relationship building, available family/home support, routine/prescriptive assignments, students remembering their homework, writing abilities of students, and avoiding or reducing student apathy as the key factors to increase student homework completion.

Participant E

Participant E is a sixth-grade science teacher. Participant E perceived highly attainable work, interesting work, level of rigor, relationship building, available family/home support, routine/prescriptive assignments, and the writing abilities of students as the key factors to increase student homework completion. This participant believed assignments that were low risk, meaning the students had already done work very similar had the highest rates of return especially if the work was short in duration to complete. This participant believed there are multiple factors which influence student homework completion.

During the interview, Participant E shared family/home support as being a major factor influencing students’ completion of homework assignments; “a lot of kids [it] is just the lack of control they have over their situation outside of school, whether it's that they're overly scheduled

or they have other responsibilities.” Working to provide supports to overcome that missing home support was successful as shared by Participant E during the interview,

I think being very specific about providing optional support time, whether it's after school, like in the old days, or specific targeted Google Meets. But telling kids that specifically I will be available at this time to work on this assignment has increased the level of participation in more rigorous tasks...

Participant E also would offer extended time to students who needed it, or would try to build a relationship with encouragement that helped to develop a level of trust. These appeared effective interventions to Participant E.

The participant shared that using multiple strategies including this combined strategy of offering support through a personal relationship filled several gaps that helped increase student homework completion. Using homework assignments that are routine and that were achievable, “[students] look at it very quickly and they make an assumption whether it's doable or not.” When asked about the rigor of specific assignments, Participant E explained, “To be perfectly honest, I didn't intend it to be [rigorous], but I think the kids found the amount of reading a little bit uncomfortable” and students might make decisions about whether to complete an assignment or not based upon the amount of perceived rigor for some assignments. This participant also infrequently had students begin a homework assignment in class and instead assigned homework as a separate entity from the classwork. This was unique from other participants.

Participant E offered homework for review and reinforcement was more likely completed by students using work that would “dust off their prior knowledge” or to assess “where [students] were in their understanding of the [content] before we went a whole lot further into the unit.” This type of review as homework enabled homework to appear achievable to many

students but reading remained an impediment for some and required the development of a variety of scaffolds to make the work achievable.

Participant F

Participant F is a fifth-grade science teacher. In response to the research question, Participant F perceived homework assignments that are routine with clear expectations that are started in class and finished for homework which students see as attainable without a level of rigor that brings frustration as important. This participant also believed that homework assignments that considered the executive functioning of students and helping to provide supports to assist students in remembering to complete their homework while also encouraging positive student habits as useful at increasing student homework completion.

Participant F said in fifth grade the assignments most likely to be completed are simple one step assignments due the following class but studying or assessment preparation is often not done. This participant believes executive functioning is a primary factor affecting student homework completion, “they didn't have the executive functioning to find the resource” even if supports were available and lamented the variety of student excuses for why homework was not completed by students. Creating homework assignments with little rigor that are routine is helpful, “The fifth graders tend to do better, and I think I said this in the survey, with things that are one step processes” and not needing multiple resources as required to do the assignment is helpful. This participant also worked on executive functioning for students through scheduling and timing of homework assignments which included knowing when students had a band concert that evening or were going to be at a gymnastics tournament over the weekend.

Participant G

Participant G is a fifth-grade science teacher. Participant G perceived homework with clear expectations, completing unfinished classwork as homework, highly attainable work, interesting work, executive functioning of students, level of rigor, routine/prescriptive assignments, and students remembering their homework as the key factors to increase student homework completion. This participant said through the survey, interview, and the archival samples that building in supports for students to help manage the executive functioning of fifth graders was extremely important in helping students complete their homework.

Participant G said in the survey that “EdPuzzles, Quizlet” or other similar technology tools tended to have high student homework completion rates. This participant also said that using simulations or online interactive games gained students’ attention and helped to increase homework completion if related to the online games or simulations as these were homework assignments of high interest to students. A lively discussion of gamification in teaching ensued in which the participant said gamification was very effective at getting students to engage while trying to balance the competitiveness among students.

Participant G worked to combine homework assignments that are routine with support for students with executive functioning such as chunking of homework, offered support or help, and being flexible with due dates for students. “Students are always allowed to submit late work and to redo assignments if they are not happy with their grades.” According to this participant, students would often say they “forgot” or “did not know it was due” so accepting the late work allowed students to still benefit from doing the assignment.

Participant H

Participant H is a fifth-grade science teacher. In response to the research question, Participant H perceived the homework assignments that are most effective at increasing student homework assignment completion included homework with clear expectations, homework that students see as achievable independently without needing parent or family support that is designed to consider the student habits of the individual students in the class. This participant also stated that with the range of family support available from parents being unable to provide any support to parents who provide a great deal of support, that creating homework that students can complete on their own that still has value is important so that students without that available home support are not at a disadvantage.

Participant H stated increased homework completion by students involved homework assignments that are routine with clear directions that is regularly checked and used in class. This places an emphasis on routine assignments and accountability to use those assignments in class or have a grade for those assignments. This participant tended to use the same type of homework assignment each week as a method of helping students master the vocabulary of science. This included creating pictures to represent vocabulary words, developing student created definitions, and combining that student generated work with the teacher provided examples.

During the interview, Participant H continued their description that homework assignments that are routine with accountability are important because “[students] have more trouble participating in class if they don't have [the homework].” Using homework assignments that are routine that do not require parental assistance is helpful as not all students have the same home supports available but also assisting students with good student habits is a benefit as fifth

graders are at vastly different developmental levels. Archival homework sample information from Participant H suggested home, “good student habits,” and knowing what the assignment is are key to increasing student homework completion.

Participant J

Participant J is a multi-grade social studies teacher. Participant J perceived homework with clear expectations, highly attainable work, interesting work, executive functioning of students, level of rigor, routine/prescriptive assignments, students remembering their homework, and student habits as the key factors to increase student homework completion. Participant J expressed that ensuring homework that students see as achievable independently or with teacher embedded supports is one of the best ways to assist students in completing and turning in homework. It should be noted that Participant J did not take part in the interview portion of this study.

Participant J explained in the survey that, “Work that is at [the students’] instructional level and easily accessible as well as content that they have good knowledge on” leads to increased homework completion. Archival homework sample information from Participant J showed how embedded supports for students was important for increased student homework completion. Using a gradual release toward student responsibility for what the student had to do was an important part of the support. The participant indicated that late work was accepted if the student had specific questions about an assignment and then the teacher and student would work on finishing the assignment together.

Participant K

Participant K is a fifth-grade social studies teacher. In response to the research question Participant K perceived homework assignments that most contribute to student homework

completion included homework that is routine and homework with clear expectations that is homework that students see as achievable independently without parent or family support. This participant believes homework assignments that considered the executive functioning of students and the ability levels of students while bolstering the positive student habits to help the student find success to be most beneficial at increasing student homework assignment completion.

Participant K explained that fifth graders need a great deal of support to be able to transition to the middle school and manage so many classes and any supports that can be used to help students remember and be able to complete work independently are strategies this participant is always looking to try.

Participant K stated that handouts have higher completion rates unless they are lost. These handouts tend to be routine, utilizing knowledge or comprehension levels of difficulty, and fairly quick and easy to complete. During the interview, Participant K asserted that executive functioning is a major obstacle for student homework completion, “it's either executive functioning issues where they can't organize or where they have difficulty organizing what they have for homework.” That executive functioning is a concern and can be exacerbated by a lack of available home support. Homework assignments that are routine or for reinforcement was more likely to be completed due to the familiarity students had with the content, as homework could “reinforce everything that they've been doing in class for a certain period of time.” Prescribed locations for resources were also beneficial and helped with executive functioning, “everything in their planner and on Google Classroom, within the individual subject area, plus we created a team website with a calendar that shows homework for all the subjects....I would provide them with the checklist on Monday.” Participant K indicated extended due dates were beneficial if students had intermediate deadlines. Late work and resubmissions were allowed to

“help solidify things that [students] might have been a little bit confused about initially.”

Students executive functioning could be an impediment as students “thought they were all set” or forgot.

Data Synthesis

In response to the single research question, which homework assignments, per middle school teachers' perspectives, are most effective at increasing student homework assignment completion; surveys, interviews, and the archival homework data were looked at collectively and had a total of 16 themes or trends across the three instruments which overlapped and could be combined into four key factors that describe teacher perceptions of what homework assignments contribute to increased student homework completion. There were similarities in wording and phrases used by the participants that show patterns or connections within the collected data. These four key factors which participants perceived about which homework assignments affected student homework completion across the three types of data collected refined included (a) homework assignments that are routine, (b) homework with clear expectations, (c) homework that students see as achievable with or without scaffolds, and (d) homework assignments that considered the executive functioning of students.

Data Connections

Homework with clear expectations, routine/prescriptive work, and whether a student needs help to complete a homework assignment was identified as more likely to be completed in the surveys, interviews, and archival homework data. When the expectations are clear then students know what to do, how to do it, and what amount of explanation or details the teacher is looking for. Completing unfinished classwork as homework supports the executive functioning of students and need for routine and prescriptive work. Executive functioning for students is

supported when students have an opportunity to begin work in class, follow routines, and understand what work needs to be completed at home and how that work is to be completed. Homework assignments that are routine that appeared attainable or achievable to students connects to the executive functioning of students, by participants C, D, E, F, and H. Attainable or achievable homework would be work that can be managed by the typical cognitive level of executive functioning skills of the students, or have scaffolds in place to make that work accessible through either reduced rigor or practiced routines enabling students to be able to know how and complete the work independently without family or home supports. Participants stated they saw homework assignments that considered the executive functioning of students affected students remembering they had homework or remembering the materials to complete the homework. Teachers considering executive functioning of students requires setting up routines so that students can remember and know how to complete an assignment. Providing homework assignments that are routine and which students are familiar with what to do and how to do it minimized the need for home support and encouraged student homework completion.

When participants considered the way an individual learns, thinks, acts, and solves problems related to homework completion, then students were provided with built in supports to help with homework completion. Simply, per the analysis of the surveys, interviews, and the archival homework samples, if students find homework to be routine with clear expectations that students see as achievable due to scaffolds to support students' executive functioning levels then students were more likely to complete the homework. The implications of these perceptions between the survey trends, interview themes, and archival homework data sample trends will be further explored in Chapter 5.

Summary

This chapter presented a review of the purpose, single research question, theoretical framework which supports the study, explanation of the study instruments, descriptions of the site and participant pool, an overview of the process of data collection, and presentation of data results. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments, as perceived by middle school teachers, most effectively result in students submitting completed homework assignments. The survey analysis, interview coding, and archival homework data analysis were explained within Chapter 4 prior to the presentation of the results.

Data were collected using three different instruments that included an online survey, an interview conducted via telephone or Google Meet, and the review, analysis, and categorization of archival homework data samples. The survey data resulted in five factors contributing to increased homework completion and submission. The interview analysis resulted in five major themes. The archival homework data sample analysis resulted in six major trends. A synthesis of data was shown and explained the overlap between the trends between surveys, interviews, and archival homework data samples.

The study findings from the surveys, interviews, and archival homework data connected to the research question are discussed in Chapter 5. This includes presentation and interpretation of findings including specific details, implications, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This qualitative exploratory phenomenological study examined the phenomenon that some homework assignments are more effective at increasing middle school students' homework assignment completion than others as perceived by middle school teachers. This research was conducted to shed light on the challenge in public school classrooms across the United States regarding the lack of homework completion by students (Bembenuddy, 2011; Cooper et al., 2006; Schrader, 2016; Xu, 2011) found within the literature review. A total of 10 participants met the eligibility criteria and completed an online survey, a distance interview, and submitted archival homework samples. Survey data were evaluated after being imported into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to allow review for trends by the researcher. Following the interviews, transcription was completed by Rev.com and reviewed by the researcher and participants for member checking and accuracy of transcription. Creswell's (2015) six steps for coding qualitative data were then used by the researcher to code the transcripts and look for themes. After a two-week break from the transcripts, the researcher returned to the transcripts and used MAXQDA to code the data and develop themes as a means of code recode analysis. A comparison was made between the researcher completed coding and MAXQDA coding resulting in a synthesis of major interview themes. Archival homework data were also collected, and these data were input into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet for analysis by the researcher to assist with answering the research question.

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments, as perceived by middle school teachers, most effectively resulted in students submitting completed assignments. This was further presented within the literature

review that teachers report many students do not consistently complete and turn in homework (DeSimone, 2018; Ferlazzo, 2013). This study was created to examine the phenomenon regarding homework that middle school teachers perceive as effective at getting students to increase their homework completion. An increase in student homework completion could benefit stakeholders including parents, students, teachers, administrators, and the community.

Using a school in suburban Massachusetts as the site, this study explored the perspectives of the middle school teacher participants and focused upon those homework assignments perceived to increase student homework assignment completion. The review of literature found many studies have investigated why students do not complete homework, how to improve homework accuracy (Trautwein, et al., 2009), or what contributes to students completing homework (Ramdass, & Zimmerman, 2011), but this study brought the voices of this small population sample of 10 middle school teachers and identified challenges that affect student homework assignment completion. The study revealed themes across surveys, interview, and archival data and those themes had overlap and could be combined into key factors that best described the middle school teacher perceptions of what homework assignments contribute to increased student homework completion including (a) homework assignments that are routine, (b) homework with clear expectations, and (c) homework that students see as achievable. A major finding of this study was the overarching factor of executive functioning and the homework assignments that considered the executive functioning of students.

This study utilized a qualitative exploratory research method with a phenomenological research design. Brinkmann (2012) said "...approaches like phenomenology or discourse analysis, have been developed in order to throw light upon human experience and social life" (p. 29). Phenomenology was selected as the methodology as this enabled the researcher to focus

on understanding lived experiences or perceptions of individual teachers through data collection while focusing upon the perceived reasoning for the rates of homework return by students.

Interpretation of Findings

Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the results of the collected data from surveys, interviews, and the review of archival homework samples. Some of the findings were connected to the research within the literature review but have not been adequately addressed in the literature from the perspective of middle school teachers regarding perceptions regarding homework that increases student homework completion. For example, in the review of literature it was found teachers should design schoolwork and homework to provide opportunities for reinforcement, practice, review, and occasionally an extension of learning for students (Epstein, 2002), but some students cannot or do not complete assigned homework (Katz, et al., 2013; Xu, 2013). This study documented the perceptions of these 10 participating middle school teachers about what homework assignments increase student homework completion. Through this research study participants described their perceptions related to homework supports, homework development, or the assigning of the homework itself to increase student homework completion. Homework supports could include reading or writing supports, extended time for homework completion, or providing resources students could access from home as described by participants J and K. Homework development includes designing homework by teachers that is routine yet interesting with clear expectations, that students will likely find success when completing and be able to finish quickly, and that is not too rigorous and does not require help at home as stated by participants A, C, E, F, and H. Homework assignment considerations these participants perceived might encourage increased student homework completion included starting the work in class so students have an opportunity to ask questions or get help, building positive

relationships with students through encouraging interactions, regulating the amount and level of reading or writing required, and supporting the executive functioning of students which might include creating supports to ensure students remember what to do and have their materials available.

Research Question

The researcher collected survey, interview, and archival homework samples that informed the single focused research question for this study. The research question addressed the phenomenon that some homework assignments are more effective in eliciting students to more often complete homework, and to identify what those assignments are. The research question also aligns with the problem and purpose statements. The following research question guided this study:

- Which homework assignments, per middle school teachers' perspectives, are most effective at increasing student homework assignment completion?

Triangulated data collection contributed to the development of key factors that describe the teachers' perceptions of what homework assignments contribute to increased student homework completion. These factors included homework assignments that are routine with clear expectations, that students see as achievable, and that include teachers' consideration of students' levels of executive functioning.

Homework Assignments That are Routine

Homework assignments that are routine according to the participants in this study, are those assignments that students have familiarity with due to experience and can anticipate what homework was due, when homework was due, and to understand based upon past routines how to do an assignment, where the students already knew and recognized the requirements of

specific homework assignments; the literature review showed there were reasons for disengagement and provided insight into how to balance assigned homework with what students could or would complete (Shields, 2010). Participant F mentioned that homework assignments that are routine are a benefit for some students while other students can manage less routine work and prefer the flexibility. Of interest is how this shows some variance in middle school student needs as perceived by these participants regarding homework assignments that are routine and how these teachers would modify the level of routine homework used based on the individual group of students they served. The finding that routine homework assignments likely increase student homework completion would impact educators in the way they plan their lessons and units of study to include opportunities for routine homework for students. Data indicated that interesting homework would increase student homework completion. Typically, homework assignments that are routine are not necessarily interesting work, per Participant H, but modifications to the approach of a lesson can make the classwork more interesting and engaging to gain student buy-in and then can encourage student homework completion of the more routine follow-up assignments as perceived by participants C and K. Participants indicated work started in class and finished for homework had a high likelihood of success and increased student homework completion. According to the participants, homework that is routine with a set sequence for students to follow and homework which is easily remembered has a higher likelihood of success especially if there is limited at home support for students.

Homework With Clear Expectations

Homework with clear expectations can ensure that students know what amount of explanation or details the teacher seeks from the student and what the student needs to do in order to be successful with the homework assignment and can negate or limit the need for at

home support as stated by Participant E. Literature indicated unclear knowledge of expectations laid out by teachers at the start of the school year or term about schoolwork and homework completion (Bembenutty, 2011) can affect homework completion. Participant C stated, “When students know what to expect, when a student thinks they can be successful...,” shows that when teachers believe students know what to expect then the teacher believes the student develops a comfort level with an assignment to avoid feeling they are taking big academic risks. This was a major trend in the surveys as work started in class and finished for homework allows students to clearly know and understand the expectations of an assignment, but also connected to the interviews and the archival homework sample data through elements of executive functioning.

Work with a high likelihood for success was seen as a means of increasing student homework completion and that work would require clear directions and expectations for students to follow and complete. Studies related to assigned homework showed connections between homework assignments and a need for practice or reinforcement as essential to gain student buy-in (Wilson & Rhodes, 2010; Yates, n.d.) and practice and reinforcement tend to include homework with clear expectations according to participants. Homework assignments with clear expectations or directions helped alleviate the need for students needing to remember what to do as those expectations were already understood allowing students to find success and build good student skills.

When teachers make expectations clear for a homework assignment then the level of rigor is managed so that students see how to complete the assignment therefore ensuring the homework assignment is more routine or prescriptive according to participants E, G, and K. Homework with clear expectations also helps to build relationships so that students know they

are being given the needed supports to be successful shown by Participant B. Teachers getting to know their students will help the teacher determine the level of specific clarity in expectations needing to be provided and can help build strong student and teacher relationships according to participants A, B, D, G, and K.

Homework that Students See as Achievable

Homework that students see as achievable with or without additional scaffolds or supports, were perceived to have a high likelihood of success. This work also appears to be quickly completed. Making work appear to be easily completed or achievable can encourage students to attempt, persevere, and then complete an assignment despite the varying levels of at home support available to students. Homework that students see as achievable as a major factor was supported through the management of the level of rigor for homework assignments. Managing the level of rigor for a homework assignment ensured the work was not too rigorous as to make students disengage but not so simple that students set it aside to finish later and forget. Participants also mentioned that homework that students see as achievable needs to be able to be completed independently by the student as the availability of at home supports can vary. Teachers acknowledging a student's available family or home supports is important for homework to be achievable. Homework that students see as achievable from the archival homework samples included those same considerations of home supports but added taking into consideration the reading and writing abilities of the students. When teachers offer opportunities for students to start work in class, this enables teachers to use anecdotal observations and formative feedback to determine if there are scaffolds that are needed to support students in their learning and help students know what materials are needed to take home to complete the homework assignment.

Providing scaffolds for students to complete homework can help to mitigate the level of rigor making assignments more achievable and may negate student apathy. Any scaffolds can help to build good student skills to benefit the student in the classroom and when doing homework. Work with little reading was seen as a benefit by teachers for improving student homework completion because of the achievability of completion for homework with varied reading abilities of students. Participants felt that students often avoid reading as homework due to a lack of accountability or problems by students with accessing the reading itself. Completing reading in class can ensure the text is read and allow for follow up questions at home. Another strategy used by participants was to use scaffolds such as text to speech apps or making audio recordings available. These supports help make longer text readings more attainable for students according to these participants.

Major Findings

Two areas of noted interest surfaced within the findings. The first area was discovered within the finding that considered the executive functioning of students; this was an overarching factor connected to students completing homework assignments. The second area was discovered within the finding that considered routine homework assignments; there were unexpected variances in the level of student needs connected to homework assignments which surfaced and required specific interventions on the part of the teacher based on student needs.

Homework Assignments that Considered the Executive Functioning of Students

Consideration by participants of the executive functioning of students was the overarching theme found in interviews as most effective at increasing student homework assignment completion, but executive functioning is a complex learning matter. Executive functioning in education is the way an individual learns, thinks, acts, and solves problems (The

Understood Team, 2020). Initial literature review findings reveal that homework can be essential at increasing student learning when used effectively and when utilizing best-teaching practices (Bryan et al., 2004) which can include developing homework which accommodates executive functioning (The Understood Team, 2020).

Participants stated they perceived homework assignments that considered the executive functioning of students affected students remembering they had homework or remembering the materials to complete the homework. Executive functioning of students was a primary factor affecting a student's ability to complete homework. Archival data samples such as vocabulary sheets, study guides, or routinely used reflection worksheets showed major trends included students remembering or forgetting they had homework or to bring materials home which are consequences of under-developed executive functioning skills according to participants A, B, C, F, G, H, and K. Vocabulary sheets that were used included a student created definition, a student generated image, and the teacher provided definition which were completed as students moved through a unit were rated with a high rate of return. Study guides with sections for vocabulary, sections for Venn diagrams or other visual organizers, and sections for information about key objectives being taught also had a high rate of return. Also, reflection worksheets that were assigned on a given day each week, due on a specific day, and had opportunities for students to be reminded of what sections to complete had high rates of return. These samples that were routine, with clear expectations, that students could complete independently due to the consideration of students' executive functioning abilities were the homework assignments teachers perceived as most effective at increasing student homework assignment completion.

Teachers perceived that assignments started in class and then finished for homework increased student homework completion. This strategy would support executive functioning as

starting homework in class ensures students know what materials are needed to complete the work and in-class reminders from teachers can help reinforce those needed materials as students begin the work. This also indicated work with a high likelihood of success would increase student homework completion. By accommodating the executive functioning needs of the students at a particular grade level and providing homework that students see as achievable teachers perceived students would more likely complete the work. Teachers developing homework assignments that recognize and consider the executive functioning of students in the classroom can help to build a level of trust between students and teachers which can also encourage students to seek help when needed according to participants A, B, C, F, and H. Teachers considering the executive functioning of students when designing homework requires setting up routines so that students can remember and know how to complete an assignment, use scaffolds to support students' executive functioning levels which would then result in students more likely to complete the homework and would help students develop those student habits that will help support students throughout school.

Homework assignments designed that included the factors found in this study might include vocabulary work where students routinely complete a provided definition, a student definition, and a drawing. Another example of a homework assignment that meets these criteria could include study guides completed in stages as moving through a unit. Another suggestion for a homework assignment these teachers perceived would increase student homework completion would include follow up questions from a reading completed in class where the teacher pointed out salient points from the reading in the classroom before the assigning of the homework.

Variance Among Student Needs

Students have a wide range of abilities within the typical inclusion setting within the middle school classroom resulting in great variation in what clear expectations for homework means to different students (D'Amico, 2014). This includes consideration of the reading and writing abilities of students so having instructions which are clear to all levels of readers, having leveled writing supports for students with varied abilities with writing, and homework with clear expectations about the teachers expectations for individual students might vary among students can assist students with feeling they have a good understanding of the expectations for assignments. The literature also shows regular education students have trouble with homework at times, and students with special needs or English learners experienced increased difficulty with completion, which affects the overall outcomes of assigned homework (Bryan et al., 2004).

Homework with a high likelihood of success is also ability dependent which may require differentiation for homework or homework expectations among students (Timmermans & Rubie-Davies, 2018). Adjusting the level of rigor of the work may include offering tiers of challenge for students as stated by Participant H or a menu of assignments to ensure students have a high likelihood of success. As Participant F stated, the teacher does not want the work beneath the instructional level of some students while being too difficult for others. Accounting for student needs requires a teacher to know and build relationships with their students.

Findings of noted interest. Work with little reading was seen as a factor contributing to increased homework completion across all forms of the collected data. By providing reading supports in class, such as reading as a group, or providing text to speech or audio recordings for long reading samples helped make reading assignments a more routine task. This made the reading more accessible to students with differing abilities.

Challenges for Teachers. The challenges for teachers in trying to account for these many factors can be numerous. Starting work in class to make it more routine may not always be possible due to classroom time limitations as stated by participants B, E, and F and a teacher may not be able to work through all the questions and issues of students in the time available as indicated by participants A, B, C, E, and G. Ensuring homework assignments are as routine as possible may limit the need for home support which can vary widely from student to student.

Implications

This study sought to explore the phenomenon of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion as perceived by middle school teachers. The problem studied within this qualitative exploratory phenomenological study researched the phenomenon that some homework assignments are more likely completed by students and sought to learn what those assignments are as perceived by middle school teachers. This study led to conclusions regarding what those homework assignments are as perceived by middle school teachers.

An implication of this study is that teachers assign homework tasks that are routine or prescriptive for students as a means of increasing student homework completion. As studies within the research showed the frequency of homework is more likely to produce completion when predictable for students. A shift in homework planning by teachers could allow designing homework that is more routine such as following a particular homework schedule, using specific homework assignments on given days of the week, or allowing extra time between assignment and completion.

A second implication of this study is that teachers understand that homework assigned have clear expectations for the homework as a means of increasing student homework

completion. Middle school teachers ensuring students know what to expect from homework assignments encourages completion.

A third implication of this study is that teachers assign homework that students see as achievable due to scaffolds as a means of increasing student homework completion. It is important students see through opportunities to correctly work with an assignment that they can achieve success at home.

A fourth implication is that teachers design homework that students can complete successfully at home without parental or other family supports as the level of available support at home can vary. Teachers making more resources available for students to access at home may help eliminate missing school related resources as a problem for some students. This access to resources is important as it may create opportunities for the homework assignment to be more achievable despite the varied level of family or home support.

A fifth and final implication of this study is that teachers consider and support the executive functioning levels of students when assigning homework as a means of increasing student homework completion. Teachers assessing the types of homework which results in lower levels of return and determining if executive functioning is affecting completion of those assignments can provide opportunities for adjustment by teachers. Teachers can then determine if students need scaffolding, chunking of assignment sections, extended due dates, or reminders to help increase homework completion.

Recommendations for Action

Recommendations for action presented are founded upon this study's analysis of data, findings, and conclusions. These recommendations are meant for middle school educators and those who design homework assignments. Change is a process and takes buy-in from all

participants including leadership and teachers, agreement for the need for change, and the understanding of what drives the need for change (Owings & Kaplan, 2003). This change is needed to resolve the problem of students not completing assigned homework.

Recommendations for Middle School Educators

Recommendations are based upon the limitations and findings of this study. It is recommended that middle school teachers consider the following when designing homework:

1. Assign homework assignments that are routine to help to eliminate disparities for differences in levels of family or home support among students.
2. Provide homework with clear expectations with opportunities to ask questions and see exemplars.
3. Assign homework that students see as achievable due to scaffolds while using needs-based interventions as the developmental abilities of individual middle schoolers are varied. This may require differentiation, an RTI model, have different expectations for different outcomes for students, or getting assistance from another educator in the building.
4. Build connections and relationships with students and learn about individual student circumstances in order to be supportive of the needs of students which increases homework assignment completion. This requires teachers to get to know their students.
5. Provide homework assignments that consider the executive functioning of students which may involve creating a routine of helping students develop a homework management system to manage problems with executive functioning or providing supports for students to access at home. Executive functioning abilities within a

given classroom can vary greatly so different students may need many supports and other students may want more freedom without the restrictive supports offered.

Recommendations for Further Study

Recommendations are based upon the limitations and findings of this study. A recommendation for this study would include gathering information and input from parents and students, which could offer a new perspective regarding students thinking about homework and parent observations. Students and parents could inform teachers and administrators understanding and knowledge of existing homework assignment supports and compare to teachers reports of which supports are, in fact, available.

Another recommendation for further study is to conduct qualitative studies to learn more how student attitudes impact homework completion. These student attitudes could include connections to the subject, the teacher, the type of homework, etc. and examine the effects of these influences on student homework completion. This could be a longitudinal study following a group of students through the middle school years and might give insight into specifics for a particular grade level or how students' homework completion needs progress as they move through middle school.

Further study could include collecting data to differentiate subgroups of students including students with special needs, English language learners, or students with limited homework support at home. This could include gathering information from teachers, students, or both teachers and students. This may help to show whether there are subgroups that are having a major impact on overall homework completion rates or subgroups that could benefit from specific supports that were not identified in this study.

Further research might include studying a large sample size of teacher participants in varied geographic regions throughout the United States to gain more insight across middle schools in diverse areas. This could include comparing rural, suburban, and urban settings or could compare states using different curricula.

Other studies could include all subject areas within middle school rather than being confined to social studies and science to provide a means of supporting students across more subject areas. Analyzing and collecting a greater variety and number of middle school teachers data might result in additional themes or trends that may prove important for increasing student homework completion.

Further research is recommended in assessing administrative opinions about homework and expectations, including principals, assistant principals, curriculum directors/coordinators, and central office administrators or school committee members for the variety of grade levels. This future research might help create guidelines or direction about the progression of homework expectations from one grade level to the next within middle school.

Furthermore, investigating which types of homework affect the level of learning by middle school students could help to determine the efficacy of homework assigned at this level. That information could help to tailor the types of homework assignments that are designed for middle school students in specific subject areas.

Conclusion

This qualitative phenomenological exploratory study sought to explore the phenomenon of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion as perceived by middle school teachers. The results are presented in Chapter 4 and were aligned with previous research mentioned within the literature review in Chapter 2. This study has

uncovered homework assignments, as perceived by middle school teachers, that most effectively result in students submitting completed homework assignments. The data regarding perceptions of the middle school participants who took part in this study led to the creation of four factors that were perceived to increase middle school student homework completion. These factors include homework assignments that are routine, homework with clear expectations, homework that students see as achievable with or without scaffolds, or homework assignments that considered the executive functioning of students that would lead to increased rates of student homework completion.

An analysis of what middle school teachers perceived promoted increased student homework completion led to other inferences regarding students and homework completion. Results from this study have brought a voice to the teachers to communicate their perceptions and present their observations to others in middle school education regarding middle school teachers' perceptions of the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion. Learning what teachers perceive influences student completion of homework began a desire for this researcher to look deeper into causes for homework incompleteness, and what middle school teachers' perceptions related to the phenomenon regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion. Based upon these findings, teachers want to develop and assign homework assignments that students will complete.

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Appendix A

Zeroes Aren't Permitted Team Policy and Form Used 2012-2017

Homework is an essential aspect of the learning process and is assigned by teachers for the following purposes:


- To help students improve their understanding of concepts and skills
- To prepare students for the next class lesson
- To offer students an opportunity for alternative assessment
- To build self-sufficiency and a work ethic for the future

Students are expected to complete homework. Students on the [REDACTED] team will be taking part in a program called Zeroes Aren't Permitted as a means of helping students receive the benefit of assigned work. This program recognizes the importance of assigned homework and allows students who don't finish homework to stay after school to complete the assignment. When a student does not complete a homework assignment they will be assigned Z.A.P. sessions until the assignment is complete. That assignment will be checked for accuracy and may be assessed a grade that is 50% its value. It is in a student's best interest to complete assignments and turn in when due. Students who bring in the completed homework before the assigned ZAP session will NOT have to serve the after-school session.



You have a Z.A.P.

Zeroes Aren't Permitted
 You will spend an after school session
 working on your missing homework unless
 you bring it in before the ZAP date.



Name: _____

Today's Date: _____

Date of ZAP session: _____

Circle one: ELA Math Sci SS WL **Block:** ____

Missing Assignment Description: _____

Reason for no homework: _____

Teacher Signature: _____

Student Signature: _____

Parent Signature: _____

Appendix B

Missing Homework Email Template Used 2017-2020

This is for the work assigned on _____ and due today, on Google Classroom called _____.

My current records indicate that your child did not turn in or earn credit for the homework assignment that was due today. If your child was absent or already has the work completed, please encourage them to turn it in to me as soon as possible. I look forward to working with your child to complete these assignments that are essential to understanding the concepts taught in class. The assignment can be found on my google classroom site.

██████████ Team Homework Policy:

It is the responsibility of the student to record all assignments in the student agenda book or on their digital device. Students should expect homework on a daily basis approximately 20 – 30 minutes per subject. If a single night’s assignment extends beyond 30 minutes of focused work time, on 1 subject’s assignment, parents may write a note/email excusing their child from the rest of that assignment.

██████████ team has the following late assignment policy...

- Reduced credit if the assignment is turned in within 1 week of due date.
 - No credit for the assignment if it is turned in later than 1 week after it was due, however the teacher will give the student feedback on the assignment.
 - Parents are encouraged to check the student grading portal ██████████ or contact teachers to find out about missing/late work.
 - When homework is a persistent problem, parents may be contacted or requested to come to school for a conference with the teacher(s) and the student.
 - Students may be required to stay after school or miss break to complete the assignment.
- Thank you, Jennifer Keck

Portuguese: Isto é para o trabalho atribuído em _____ e devido hoje, no Google sala de aula chamado _____.

Meus registros atuais indicam que seu filho não entregou ou ganhou crédito para a tarefa que era devida hoje. Se o seu filho estava ausente ou já tiver concluído o trabalho, incentive-os a transformá-lo o mais rápido possível. Aguardo trabalhar com o seu filho para completar estas tarefas que são essenciais para a compreensão dos conceitos ensinados na aula. A atribuição pode ser encontrada no meu Google site.

Política de Dever de Casa da Equipe ██████████:

É da responsabilidade do aluno registrar todas as atribuições na agenda diária do estudante ou em seu dispositivo digital. Os alunos devem esperar tarefas de casa diariamente aproximadamente 20-30 minutos por matéria. Se a atribuição de uma única noite se estende para além de 30 minutos de tempo de trabalho focado, na atribuição do 1 matéria, os pais podem escrever um nota/e-mail desculpando sua criança do resto dessa atribuição.

A equipe ██████████ tem a seguinte política sobre deveres atrasados ...

- Redução de crédito se o trabalho for entregue dentro de 1 semana da devida data.
- Não crédito para a atribuição se o trabalho for entregue 1 semana após a data devida, no entanto, o professor dará feedback ao aluno sobre a atribuição.

-Os pais são incentivados a verificar o estudante de classificação portal [REDACTED] ou contactar os professores para descobrir sobre o trabalho ausente/atrasado.

-Quando o dever de casa é um problema persistente, os pais podem ser contactados ou pedidos para vir à escola para uma conferência com o professor (es) e o aluno.

-Os alunos são obrigados a ficar depois da escola ou faltar ao recreio para completar o dever.

Obrigado, Jennifer Keck

Appendix C

APPROVED FOR USE BETWEEN

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Teacher Informed Consent Letter

Version 8.22.18

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

PROJECT TITLE: Middle School Teacher Perceptions Affecting Student Homework Engagement

Principal Investigator(s): Jennifer E. Keck

Introduction:

- Please read this form. You may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this qualitative narrative inquiry research study, exclusive to this research setting, is to explore middle school teachers' perceptions of homework strategies they discovered to be most effective at motivating and engaging students toward homework completion. For this study homework engagement will be taken to mean completion, attempts to complete homework, or efforts to gain assistance in completing the homework assignment.

Who will be in this study?

Middle School Teachers at this site school

What will I be asked to do?

Complete an online survey, engage in a ~40-minute interview, share archival data including 3-5 or more representative samples of homework assigned with completion rates.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

There are no known risks associated with taking part in this study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

A benefit includes learning the outcomes of teacher perceived effective homework within this site school for middle school students.

What will it cost me?

The cost to you will be the time it takes to complete the survey, time to take part in the interview, and allow access to your archival data including representative samples of homework assigned with completion rates.

How will my privacy be protected?

Data will not be anonymous and will include your name but will be deidentified with an alphanumeric pseudonym for survey data, interview data, and the collected archival samples of homework. No one other than the researcher will know you have taken part in the survey. Any identifying information will be removed from the data. If this study is submitted for publication, a by-line will indicate the participation of multiple grade level teachers in "a MetroWest middle school".

How will my data be kept confidential?

Data will be kept confidential to the greatest extent possible by deidentifying information with codes known only to the researcher. Data will be saved on the researcher's personal computer located in a personal and secured space and is password protected. Upon completion of the study, acceptance and approval of the dissertation, all data will be deleted and a Disk Cleanup will overwrite the data.

What are my rights as a research participant?

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University.
- Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with Jennifer Keck.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.
 - If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.
- If you sustain an injury while participating in this study, your participation may be ended.

What other options do I have?

- You may choose not to participate.

Whom may I contact with questions?

- The researcher conducting this study includes Jennifer Keck
 - For more information regarding this study, please contact Jennifer Keck (978) 855-7420 or jkeck1@une.edu
- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Jennifer Keck or Mary Bachman DeSilva.
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or irb@une.edu.

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

- You will be given a copy of this consent form.
-

How will my privacy be protected?

Data will not be anonymous and will include your name but will be deidentified with an alphanumeric pseudonym for survey data, interview data, and the collected archival samples of homework. No one other than the researcher will know you have taken part in the survey. Any identifying information will be removed from the data. If this study is submitted for publication, a by-line will indicate the participation of multiple grade level teachers in "a MetroWest middle school".

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Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

- You will be given a copy of this consent form.
-

Appendix D

Survey Questions as Used in Data Collection with Participants

Teacher Informed Consent Letter will be sent via an email and can be accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/ydyeospn> to each potential participant including a unique link to the REDCap survey and a message saying, “Attached is a link to the survey, including informed consent, for participation in data collection. I would appreciate it if you would complete this survey within two weeks. You may save and return to the survey later if you need to. Thank you so much for your participation! Jennifer”

The survey can be viewed via a PDF file at <https://tinyurl.com/ybm8jz99>.

The following is the survey in plain text form.

<p>By clicking the box to proceed this action evidences you understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with your participation as a research subject. You agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily. You will receive a printed copy of this document via email. Select one...</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> PROCEED <input type="checkbox"/> No Thank</p>
<p>You may skip any question you feel you cannot or do not wish to answer and that action will have no impact on the relationship between you and the researcher.</p> <p>You are requested to schedule a distance interview (virtual or telephone) with the researcher using your preferred platform including, telephone, FaceTime, Zoom, Google Meet, or some other communication distance platform at your convenience within the next 14 days if possible. A later date is also acceptable if needed. It is further requested that you email three or more samples of homework assigned this school year with completion rates, as a ratio or percentage, with keyword or phrases you believe describe your reasoning for the rates of return by students. Those homework samples may be submitted at a later date if needed as well. As compensation for your participation in this study including the survey, interview, and sharing of archival homework data, you may enter a lottery for a \$100 VISA gift card. A total of three gift cards are available.</p>	
<p>What grade level do you teach?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> 5th grade <input type="checkbox"/> 6th grade <input type="checkbox"/> 7th grade <input type="checkbox"/> 8th grade</p>
<p>What subject area do you teach?</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Science <input type="checkbox"/> Social Studies</p>

How long have you been a public school teacher?	
How many missing assignments do you record during a typical day when homework is due? (i.e. 5 of 50)	
During a typical academic week, how many days per week do you assign homework?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> More than 5
How much time would an average student's homework for your class take on a typical evening when homework is assigned? (Assuming they used their time wisely and without distraction.)	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-15 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> 15-30 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> 30-45 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> 45-60 minutes <input type="checkbox"/> More than an hour
What percentage of the overall course grade does homework contribute?	<input type="checkbox"/> 0-10% <input type="checkbox"/> 11-20% <input type="checkbox"/> 21-30% <input type="checkbox"/> 31-40% <input type="checkbox"/> 41-50% <input type="checkbox"/> 51-60% <input type="checkbox"/> 61-70% <input type="checkbox"/> 71-80% <input type="checkbox"/> 81-90% <input type="checkbox"/> 91-100%
List all the types of work you use weekly for homework...	
What homework assignments do you believe most contribute to students' increased homework completion?	
What are the main objectives for student learning with homework as assigned in your class? (select 3-5)	<input type="checkbox"/> Additional practice interacting with content <input type="checkbox"/> Allow for transference (completing work in a different setting) <input type="checkbox"/> Allowing parents to see students doing assigned work <input type="checkbox"/> Analyze thinking (design, connect, apply thinking, prove) <input type="checkbox"/> Classify similar or dissimilar ideas or concepts <input type="checkbox"/> Collect data (observe, measure, count) <input type="checkbox"/> Creating another opportunity for grades for students <input type="checkbox"/> Interpret data (charts, graphs, tables)

	<input type="checkbox"/> Memorize (recall facts, definitions, formulas, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Order, compare, estimate, approximate <input type="checkbox"/> Reinforce prior learning <input type="checkbox"/> Revise thinking (critique, draw conclusions, investigate, assess) <input type="checkbox"/> Solve “story” problems with explanations of supporting details <input type="checkbox"/> Understand (Concepts, relationships, theorems) <input type="checkbox"/> Other
<p>If you selected "Other" for the question asking what are the main objectives for student learning with homework as assigned in your class, what is/are the main reason(s)?</p>	
<p>Thank you for your participation.</p> <p>You are requested to schedule a distance interview (virtual or telephone) with the researcher using your preferred platform including, telephone, FaceTime, Zoom, Google Meet, or some other communication distance platform at your convenience within the next 14 days if possible. A later date is also acceptable if needed. It is further requested that you email three or more samples of homework assigned this school year with completion rates, as a ratio or percentage, with keyword or phrases you believe describe your reasoning for the rates of return by students. Those homework samples may be submitted at a later date if needed as well.</p> <p>As compensation for your participation in this study including the survey, interview, and sharing of archival homework data, you may enter a lottery for a \$100 VISA gift card. A total of three gift cards are available.</p> <p>Thank you for taking the survey. Have a great day! Jennifer</p>	

After survey submission, the participant will receive an email with a PDF of the Informed Consent form, and the body of the email will say...

Attached is a copy of the informed consent notice for your records.

As a reminder, you are requested to schedule a distance interview (virtual or telephone) with the researcher using your preferred platform including, telephone, FaceTime, Zoom, Google Meet, or some other communication distance platform at your convenience within the next 14 days if possible. A later date is also acceptable if needed. It is further requested that you email three or more samples of homework assigned this school year with completion rates, as a ratio or percentage, with keyword or phrases you believe describe your reasoning for the rates of return by students. Those homework samples may be submitted at a later date if needed as well.

As compensation for your participation in this study including the survey, interview, and sharing of archival homework data, you may enter a lottery for a \$100 VISA gift card. A total of three gift cards are available.

Thank you so much for your assistance in this research. Jennifer Keck

Appendix E

Semi-Structured Narrative Interview Questions as Used

Informed consent will be reconfirmed. While we talk, would it be acceptable if I make an audio recording so I can be sure to accurately capture your thoughts? The recording will only be heard by me, will be transcribed, and later deleted and of course, the interview and recording are voluntary. Does this sound acceptable to you? If you do not want to continue or if you wish you may skip any question you feel you cannot or do not want to answer and that action will have no impact on the relationship between you and the researcher. For this study homework completion will be taken to mean completion, attempts to complete homework, or efforts to gain assistance in completing the homework assignment.

Interview Questions:

1. What homework do you assign that are most effective in getting students to complete and submit homework?
2. Do you feel the typically completed homework is rigorous? Explain.
3. What have you done, recently or in the past, to increase homework assignment completion, even if it only worked for one student?
4. What relationship do you perceive between homework completion, grades, and student success?
5. What do you believe are the primary causes for students who do not typically complete their homework?

Think of two students who have been resistant toward completing homework who you were able to get to complete some or more homework; we will call them student A and student B,.

6. What seemed to increase homework assignment completion for student A?

7. What seemed to increase homework assignment completion for student B?

If homework samples are emailed to the researcher prior to the interview skip to question 9, otherwise stop after question 8.

8. It is requested that you email three or more samples of homework assigned this school year with completion rates, as a ratio or percentage, with keyword or phrases you believe describe your reasoning for the rates of return by students. Those homework samples may be submitted at a later date if needed as well. Thank you.


9. For each sample discuss the following...

- a. Why did you assign this work? (Objectives and purpose)
- b. What background information do I need to know about this assignment?
 - i. Was it begun in class and finished for homework?
 - ii. Was it assigned and given a later due date? Etc.
- c. Do you feel this is a rigorous assignment? Explain why or why not.
- d. What was the rate of completion?
- e. What were the reasons given by some students for not completing the work, if any?
- f. Do you believe there were other reasons involved in work non-completion? Explain.
- g. Thank you for your help in this study.

Appendix F

Permission for Use and Modification of Online Survey

NCES: <https://nces.ed.gov/help/>



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WWC HELP DESK

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Connect With the WWC



Appendix G

Video and Email Recruitment Script

The following is the script used in the initial email sent to potential participants. The email will have a video of the researcher reading the script, but the script will also be in the body of the email. Video may be accessed via <https://tinyurl.com/yao3sv3t>.

Hi, you may not be aware that I have been working on my doctorate in education for the past 2½ years. I have finished the coursework and the research for my dissertation, and I am now ready to begin the data collection and I am going to need your help.

The dissertation title is...Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of Homework Assignments Effective at Increasing Student Homework Completion

You will be encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary and your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the university or your relationship with me, but I am hoping to have as many participants as possible.

This study seeks to explore the phenomenon of which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion as perceived by middle school teachers.

The research question is Which homework assignments, per middle school teachers' perspectives, are most effective at increasing student homework assignment completion?

You will need to complete an online survey taking approximately 20 minutes and a distance interview taking approximately 45 minutes. You will be requested to email 3 or more samples of homework assigned this school year with completion rates with keyword or phrases that you believe describes your reasoning for the rates of return by students.

As compensation for your participation in this study including the survey, the interview, and the sharing of archival homework data, you may enter a lottery for a \$100 VISA gift card. A total of 3 gift cards are available. Each eligible participant will be given a number, and a random number generator will be used to select the three participants who will receive the VISA gift cards.

An email will be coming with a link for the survey and it will include a digital copy of the informed consent. Any questions, please email me.

This study examines the phenomenon that some homework assignments are more effective at increasing students' homework assignment completion than others. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of that phenomenon and seeks to collect information from middle school teachers themselves regarding which homework assignments are more effective at increasing student homework completion through surveys, distance interviews, and the sharing of homework samples with information about each sample. We know some assignments have higher rates of return than others. I am looking to see what you perceive those assignments actually are.

This study will include Middle School Teachers from this school who assign homework minimally on a weekly basis

There are no known risks associated with taking part in this study. A benefit includes learning the teacher perceived perspectives regarding effective homework which increases homework completion.

The cost to you will be the time it takes to complete the survey and the interview, and allow access to your representative samples of homework assigned with completion rates and keywords or phrases you believe describes your reasoning for the rates of return by students.

Your privacy will be protected. Data will not be anonymous, and it will include your name, but I will replace your name with an alphanumeric pseudonym for survey data, interview data, and the collected archival samples of homework. Only I will know you have taken part in the survey although Mr. Gaglione and Dr. Rodrigues have both approved the study. Any identifying information will be removed from the data. If this study is submitted for publication, a by-line will indicate the participation of multiple grade level teachers at a middle school that has been assigned the pseudonym “Chesterton Middle School.” My dog’s name is Chester.

Data security will involve survey and interview data downloaded onto my personally owned computer which is password protected and secured in a locked residence with a security system which will maintain your privacy and security to the greatest extent possible. No other individuals will have access to the computer or the data. Upon completion of the study, acceptance, and approval of the dissertation, all the data will be deleted, and a Disk Cleanup will overwrite the data per IRB guidelines (Institutional Review Board, which is the governing body of my university to protect research participants).

During the survey or the interview, you may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason, and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time, for any reason. You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research and you may choose not to participate.

You will receive a digital copy of the informed consent form detailing all the information about the IRB and their contact information if you have any questions or concerns during the study. I hope you will consider helping me by participating in this study; thank you very much.

Appendix H

Permission for Site Study

Initial presentation of the study was made to the superintendent, principal, and assistant principal in the fall of 2019 with updates as the study evolved. Tentative permission was granted for the site study January 2020 by the superintendent of schools in preparation for IRB submission. On April 2, 2020 the research proposal was sent to the IRB for approval with approval granted on May 18, 2020. Official permission for the site study on the site school district letterhead with my name and the name of my study was received on May 26, 2020. No changes to the study were required in order for the study to be conducted at the site.



May 26, 2020

To Whom it may concern,

This will serve as my official permission for Ms. Jennifer Keck to conduct research for the study "Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of Homework Assignments Effective at Increasing Student Homework Completion".

I wish Jennifer the very best with this endeavor and look forward to seeing the completed product.

Please let me know if you need anything additional from me.

Sincerely,

Appendix I

IRB Approval



Institutional Review Board
Mary DeSilva, Chair

Biddeford Campus
11 Hills Beach Road
Biddeford, ME 04005
(207)602-2244 T
(207)602-5905 F

Portland Campus
716 Stevens Avenue
Portland, ME 04103

To: Jennifer Keck

Cc: Jacqueline Lookabaugh, Ed.D.

From: Brian Lynn, J.D.

Date: May 18, 2020

IRB Project # & Title: 051820-08; Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of Homework Assignments
Effective at Increasing Student Homework Completion

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the materials submitted in connection with the above captioned project and has determined that the proposed work is exempt from IRB review and oversight as defined by 45 CFR 46.104 (d)(1).

This approval is subject to all University policies and guidelines, including recent guidance from the Office of the Provost relating to COVID-19. This guidance states that all studies involving in-person contact with participants or participant travel for research purposes are paused until further notice.

Additional IRB review and approval is not required for this protocol as submitted. If you wish to change your protocol at any time, including after any subsequent review by any other IRB, you must first submit the changes for review.

Please contact me at (207) 602-2244 or irb@une.edu with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brian Lynn", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brian Lynn, J.D.
Director of Research Integrity

Appendix J

Site School Handbook Excerpt Regarding Homework Expectations

Homework	<p>Students are expected to do work at home that is an extension of work done in the classroom. In all areas where homework is given, various assignment techniques are utilized to achieve desired goals. Teams and teachers publish specific homework policies.</p> <p>Homework may be assigned on a regular basis Monday through Thursday and assignments may be given on weekends. It is the responsibility of the student to record all assignments in the student agenda book or on their digital device. Students should expect homework in</p>
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	<p>each course an average of 3 to 4 times per week for approximately 20 – 30 minutes per subject. Students are sometimes given long-range assignments and are instructed to set up an independent homework procedure, which will allow them to complete these assignments over a specified period of time.</p> <p>Students should develop good homework habits which may include having a consistent time and place to do homework. Students are responsible for completing and handing in homework assignments on time. In cases where assigned tasks are not completed, the following steps may be taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The student may be required to stay after school to complete assignment. ● The parents/guardians may be notified by the teacher. ● When homework is a persistent problem parents/guardians may be requested to come to school for a conference with the teacher(s) and the student. ● A student may earn reduced or no credit for the assignment.
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Appendix K

Research Participant Record of Payment for Lottery Recipients



Research Participant Record of Payment Payments Not Exceeding \$100

For participating in this research project:

- I have received a payment of: VISA gift card valued at \$100 or
- I am requesting compensation in the amount of: _____

Printed Name: _____

Address: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Principal Investigator Information

Printed/Type name: Jennifer Keck _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

This form may be used to record payments of \$100 or less to a research participant in conjunction with procedures that follow the Research Participant Incentive Payment Policy.