



When Homework Excludes Parents

What rural mathematics homework reveals about inequality and family involvement

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Research in Brief

The article reviews 18 studies and documents published between 2018 and 2024 to examine parental involvement in mathematics homework in rural South African primary schools. It identifies economic hardship, limited access to educational resources, language differences, previous schooling experiences, and curriculum barriers as factors that can restrict parents' ability to support homework. The review argues that describing such families simply as "uninvolved" can overlook the conditions shaping their participation.

The paper also highlights communication problems between schools and families. In the studies reviewed, parents could find school language and mathematics expectations difficult to navigate, particularly when the language used by schools differed from the language used at home. The review therefore presents homework as more than a task assigned to a child: it can also become a point of interaction—or tension—between school and home.

For teachers, the central practical implication is to examine whether a homework task assumes resources, time, curriculum knowledge, or language skills that families may not have. The authors' broader conclusion calls for a rethinking of how parental involvement and homework are structured, although the review is based on secondary sources and did not collect direct parental voices.

✓ Try Tomorrow

- Check one homework task for assumptions about internet access, parental subject knowledge, time, or language.
- Give students enough explanation to complete the task independently rather than making family assistance a hidden requirement.
- Where possible, invite families to support learning in ways that do not require them to reproduce classroom teaching.

★ One Key Takeaway

Homework can reveal barriers to participation that are created outside the learner—not simply a lack of parental interest.

Keywords

homework, parental involvement, mathematics education, rural schools, inequality, language, family engagement

Source Article

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