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HOMEWORK: EXPLORING TEACHERS’ BELIEFS AND PRACTICES IN RELATION WITH PUPILS’ SELF-REGULATION

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Homework is commonly assigned to primary school children, yet homework completion has not been associated with academic achievement in this age group. Nevertheless, homework has the potential to help children develop self-regulated learning strategies and adaptive beliefs. Previous studies focused on the tasks assigned only when discussing the guidelines for supporting self-regulation during homework. However, homework is a complex phenomenon including both the classroom and home environment; and several participants: teachers, parents and pupils. All these elements have the potential of affecting the homework process and its beneficial effects.

Having a social-cognitive theoretical background, this thesis set out to explore the ways teachers support pupils’ self-regulation through homework. The research focuses on the different ways teachers could possible influence their students’ self-regulatory development: teacher beliefs, homework assignments and classroom environment.

Data was collected from 13 fourth grade students (age 11) and two of their teachers from an urban school in Romania. The data consisted of open-ended interviews, which were analyzed using qualitative research methods. The main coding categories are: homework beliefs, homework assignments, classroom environment, home environment and learning strategies and self-motivation beliefs. Students’ and teachers’ views are compared in the results section.

Results show that students’ and teachers’ beliefs about homework were similar, and they both recognized personal development as the main purpose of homework. The task types were diverse and most of them supported the use of self-regulation strategies, with projects and creative writing tasks standing out. Repetitive exercises were not seen by students as useful, while challenging exercises were seen as improving self-efficacy beliefs and self-confidence. The consequences of homework not done were related to focusing on grades and tests, while assessment of projects and writing tasks through feedback had positive associations.

The results show that other elements than just the task influence students’ self-regulatory processes and beliefs while doing homework. This research contributed to both research on homework and the wider research of promoting self-regulation in the classroom. Practical recommendations are given to teachers on how to help children develop self-regulated learning skills through homework.

**Asiasanat/Keywords:** self-regulated learning, homework, teacher beliefs, classroom environment
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1 Introduction

In most educational systems homework has been seen as an essential part of schoolwork throughout history, and most children grow up spending hours on homework every week. Homework is defined as “tasks assigned to pupils by school teacher that are meant to be carried out during non-instructional time” (Cooper, 1989), and it has been the focus of many discussions, as many have argued whether it is beneficial for children or a source of tension in families which puts children under stress. Homework completion has been related with higher achievement in the case of high school and college students, but not in elementary school children (Cooper, Robinson & Patall, 2006).

However, achievement is not the only aspect that can be positively influenced by homework. Recent research found a connection between pupils’ self-regulatory skills and homework that applies to all grade levels: homework can facilitate the development of certain self-regulatory processes (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011). Homework carries the opportunity for children to work independently, establish studying habits, develop coping strategies and find learning strategies that work best for them. However, often pupils use maladaptive homework practices to cope with the task, not benefitting from the positive effects homework completion could have (Bembenutty, 2011a).

In order for homework to foster the development of self-regulated learning skills, there are several conditions it has to fulfill, most importantly pupils need to feel responsible for doing their homework, and they need to do it “willingly and with good spirit” (Coutts, 2004). However, research has shown that often pupils do not feel responsible for their homework (Warton, 1997) or homework experience is not a positive one for pupils. Several studies focused on pupils’ views on homework, and they pointed out several problems with homework (it is boring, too easy, too difficult, etc.).

Although classroom practices have changed over the years focusing more and more on pupil engagement, homework practices have remained the same. There has been some research focusing on teachers’, pupils’ or parents’ views on homework (Bempechat, Li, Neier, Gillis, & Holloway, 2011; Hong, Wan, & Peng, 2011; Warton, 2001; Xu & Yuan, 2003). However, there is a lack in qualitative studies focusing on analyzing the relation between teachers’ and pupils’ views on homework.
The aim of this study is to discover the ways teachers can set the ground for the development of self-regulated learning skills through homework. The empirical study explores the relation between pupils’ and teachers’ homework practices and beliefs through the lens of self-regulated learning theory. The homework tasks pupils are exposed to, as well as teachers’ attitudes and beliefs all influence the goals pupils set and the strategies they use while doing homework. By looking at how teachers and their pupils perceive homework and what pupils’ attitude is towards the tasks teachers choose and the kind of self-regulatory strategies they report using while doing homework, this study sets out to uncover the ways in which teachers can influence the development of pupils’ adaptive homework practices and self-regulation skills.
2 Self-regulated learning and homework

This study is rooted in two main fields of research: self-regulated learning theory and studies on homework. In this section, these fields of research will be presented shortly, focusing on how the environment influences self-regulation and the ways self-regulated learning can be promoted; and on studies exploring the perceptions pupils, teachers and parents have of homework.

2.1 Self-regulated learning

Self-regulated learning has been in the focus of researchers for the last three decades, and there is an ample amount of research showing that the use of self-regulated learning strategies is associated with better academic performance (Dignath, Buettner & Langfeldt, 2008; Zimmerman, 2008). There are many definitions and models of self-regulated learning, but theorists agree that self-regulated learning is an active, constructive and cyclical process during which learners set goals and attempt to monitor their cognition, motivation and behavior guided and constrained by their goals and their environment (Pintrich, 2000; Zimmerman, 2000). Self-regulated learning is considered a proactive process, with learners having the role of active participants in their own learning process, setting their own goals, choosing strategies and constructing their own meaning through accessing prior knowledge and seeking out new information from their environment (Zimmerman, 2008).

There are several models that represent the self-regulated learning cycle, all sharing the main fundamental ideas, but having slightly different focus, for example: Winne & Hadwin (1998), Pintrich (2000), Zimmerman (2000). This thesis is based on Zimmerman’s work, whose cyclical model (figure 1) puts a greater emphasis on the relation between motivation and self-regulation and it is rooted in social-cognitive theory.

There are a number of interrelated self-regulatory processes and self-motivational beliefs present in self-regulated learning, which are cyclically activated. Zimmerman (2000) describes self-regulated learning as having three cyclical phases: forethought, performance and volitional control and self-reflection (see figure 1). These phases are conceptualized to occur in a sequence when a learner performs a task, but monitoring, controlling and reflecting occur at any point while performing a task, or even simultaneously (Pintrich, 2000). Learners can return to previous stages, goals and strategies can be changed throughout the
process if the learner deems the strategies used inappropriate for example (Zimmerman, 2000).

![Cyclical phases and sub processes of self-regulation](image)

In forethought phase the learner activates beliefs and processes as a preparation for the learning itself. The performance or volitional control phase includes processes that occur during the learning efforts, while the third phase - self-reflection - involves processes that occur after the learning performance. The products of the third phase, the learner’s reflections on experiences, will affect the following forethought phase, confirming the cyclical nature of self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2000).

According to Zimmerman (2000), there are two categories of forethought: task analysis, which includes goal setting and strategic planning and self-motivational beliefs, which include self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, intrinsic interest and goal orientation.

Goal setting involves deciding on the outcome of the learning. Goals can have a complex hierarchical structure consisting of proximal process goals that act as sub goals for a more
distant goal. Goals affect the strategies the learner will choose to use during planning, and they are adjusted throughout the learning process based on the feedbacks from later stages. Strategic planning involves choosing strategies in order to achieve the goal set, and it affects all areas of regulation: during cognitive planning learners set their target goal, activate relevant prior content knowledge and metacognitive knowledge; motivational planning and activation involves activating various self-motivational beliefs (Zimmerman, 2000). The beliefs activated during forethought phase can affect later phases through influencing goal setting and strategy choice. For example, research has shown that interest and self-efficacy are related to persistence and effort (e.g. Pintrich, 2000; Schunk, 2001).

Performance phase includes two processes: self-control and self-observation. Self-control processes help pupils focus on the task and use the most efficient strategies to achieve their goals. The second type of process, self-observation, involves monitoring specific aspects of performance, for example through self-recording or self-experimentation. Self-recording involves keeping a written record of the learning process, while self-experimentation refers to observing how different variation affect performance (Zimmerman, 2000), for example to determine what kind of environment allows the best concentration for the learner, the learner will experiment with different settings (with/without music, window open/close, etc.).

During self-reflection phase learners self-evaluate the information they gathered through monitoring their behavior against the goals they set during the forethought phase and make causal attributions for the outcomes. The knowledge gained through self-reflection will be activated and used in the next forethought phase (Zimmerman, 2000).

Zimmerman’s cyclical model of the phases and processes of self-regulation (figure 1 presented above) shows the phases of self-regulation and the different processes and self-motivational beliefs that are activated in each phase. However, this model does not explain how environmental factors affect self-regulation. To address this issue, Zimmerman (1989) also developed a triadic model (figure 2) which explains how the environment affects self-regulation, and a third model (Zimmerman, 2000) that focuses on how social influences affect the development of self-regulatory processes and beliefs (table 1).
2.1.1 A social cognitive view of self-regulated learning

According to social cognitive theory, behavior, personal, and environmental factors interact and influence each other continuously. Bandura calls this cycle “triadic reciprocal determinism” (Bandura, 1986, p. 23). Rooted in social cognitive theory, Zimmerman’s triadic representation of self-regulated learning (1989) explains how these influences affect each other during learning, as seen on the figure below.

![Triadic Model of Self-Regulation](image)


A key feature of the social-cognitive model of self-regulation is that it shows how personal, environmental, and behavioral factors influence each other in a reciprocal way (Zimmerman, 1989). This reciprocity manifests itself for example when setting goals. During this process, the requirements provided by a teacher, the learner’s previous performance and the learner’s self-efficacy beliefs and long-term goals all interact and influence the goals the pupil sets. For instance, when the pupil gets rubrics from teacher (environmental queue), he interprets it based on his previous performance (behavior), which in turn had influenced his self-efficacy beliefs (self). Based on this evaluation he uses the rubrics (environment) to set a goal (self). Self-regulatory activities can be perceived as mediators between the individual, their environment and their achievement/behavior (Zimmerman, 2000).

In this model there are three types of self-regulation present. Behavioral self-regulation refers to self-observation and strategic control of performance. Environmental self-regulation consists of observing and adjusting different elements of the environment.
Covert self-regulation refers to the observation and control of personal processes and beliefs, such as monitoring and adjusting motivation or emotions (Zimmerman, 2000).

Socio-environmental factors not only influence the self-regulation of learning, but also its development. According to social cognitive theorists, self-regulatory skills develop in a series of phases (Zimmerman, 2000). The table below presents the main phases of acquiring self-regulated learning according to social-cognitive theorists and describes what kind of social influences play a role in each phase (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Major feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>Cognitive acquisition of skill from modeled and verbal instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emulation</td>
<td>Demonstration of skill with social guidance and feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-controlled</td>
<td>Internalization of skill and its independent demonstration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-regulated</td>
<td>Adaptation of skill to changes in personal and contextual conditions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The acquisition of task skills often starts with observing an expert model’s performance. Through observing a model, the learner not only acquires strategies to be used, but also attitudes and motivational beliefs. By observing a model succeed, the novice learner can formulate outcome expectations, noticing what kind of series of strategies led to that outcome. This first phase is called observation. Besides modeling, also teaching, task structuring and encouragement can be the sources of self-regulatory skill acquisition (Schunk, 2001).

In the next phase of development –emulation- the learner is capable of emulating the strategies used by the model. This does not mean that the learner simply copies the model, but merely follows the general pattern of strategies used. Both in the observation and in the emulation level of development the sources of skill development are the social modeling experiences (Zimmerman, 2000).
The development of self-regulation in the third and fourth phases is dominated by self-influences rather than influences from models (Schunk, 2001). The level three learners are self-controlled, which means they are capable of using the skill independently and the skill is already internalized. Self-regulated level learners are able to adapt the skill and strategies to different contexts and personal conditions, at this level learning is self-directed (Zim-merman, 2000).

As the learners progress in the stages of development the level of social guidance gradually decreases: novice learners rely more heavily on modelling and instructions than experts do. However, this does not mean that self-regulated learners do not take advantage of social resources (Zimmerman, 2000). The difference between how a self-regulated learner and an observational level learner use social guidance is that the self-regulated learner is capable of deciding whether assistance is needed and the type and source of guidance he would need to proceed.

It is important to mention that not all learners go through all of these phases, and it is possible to become self-regulated learner without social guidance. Nevertheless, there are a number of studies (for details see Zimmerman, 2000, pp. 31-32) that show that following these levels of development and receiving the adequate amount and type of support from the environment is the most efficient way of achieving the self-regulated level.

Classrooms provide a social environment where most children acquire learning skills. In the following, the research pertaining to how social-cognitive principles have been used to support pupils’ self-regulation in the classroom context will be presented shortly.

2.1.2 Promoting self-regulated learning in the classroom

In the social-cognitive framework, self-regulation is considered dependent on context. The nature of the environment and the specific situation define what kind of self-regulatory strategies the learner will engage in (Schunk, 2001). During the forethought phase, the learner’s beliefs about the task and the context are activated. In a classroom situation, these can include perceptions of the classroom climate, classroom practices (e.g. assessment, asking questions), or the teacher. In addition, the task itself can have a big impact on the type of self-regulatory strategies the pupil uses and the self-motivational beliefs activated
during solving the task. For example, if the task is considered relevant or useful, the pupils are more likely to engage in the task and exert more effort (Pintrich, 2000).

Teachers play an important role in creating the conditions that support their pupils’ self-regulation. A meta-analysis by Dignath and Büttner (2008) has shown that effect sizes for interventions with social-cognitive background were higher in the primary-school context. They argue that this might be because interventions with social-cognitive background put an emphasis on providing feedback and supporting the development of motivational strategies.

There are several works that offer guidelines for teachers on promoting self-regulation in their classrooms based on previous research findings (e.g. Paris & Paris, 2001; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). According to Paris and Paris (2001), pupils’ self-regulation can be supported through exposure to authentic experiences, offering explicit strategy instruction and through providing opportunities to engage in tasks that require self-regulation. Pintrich and Schunk (2002) also mention providing opportunities for practice, and point out the importance of scaffolding pupil learning. Schunk and Zimmerman (2007) emphasize the importance of pupils’ experience of success and the exposure to successful models and meaningful feedback. They point out that following the four-phase development model of Zimmerman and Schunk (see table 1) is an effective way of teaching self-regulation skills and integrates seamlessly to the standard instructional sequence, as it progresses from modeled demonstration to independent practice.

In the following section, the main elements through which teachers can influence their pupils’ self-regulation will be discussed in more detail.

2.1.2.1 Role of teachers’ beliefs

Teachers’ beliefs have been found to be associated with teachers’ practices: the instructional strategies they use, the classroom climate they create, content they choose and other classroom design decisions (Moos & Ringdal, 2012).

Teachers’ educational beliefs are part of the teachers’ general belief system. Beliefs include attitudes and personal standards. Pajares (1992) reviewed the research on teacher beliefs, and found that knowledge and beliefs about education are two separate notions. This is the reason why two teachers who receive the same training exhibit different teaching behavior. While knowledge can be modified relatively easily through trainings and
instruction, beliefs only change if they are challenged and individuals are motivated to actively review and replace their beliefs. The older beliefs are more difficult to change than the newer ones (Pajares, 1992).

Teachers’ beliefs influence their classroom practices (Moos & Ringdal, 2012; Pajares, 1992), and also their pupils’ beliefs. For example, in a study by Dignath-van Ewijk and van der Werf (2012) teacher’s beliefs about the needed effort to learn mathematics predicted pupil’s beliefs about effort. From a social-cognitive point of view, this connection is easily explained by the reciprocal relation between environmental and personal factors, and pupils’ learning through modeling. In the case of a teacher with constructivist beliefs, the classroom the teacher designs and the contents the teacher chooses will reflect these beliefs. Through modeling of problem solving, and other instructional strategies used, pupils will internalize the beliefs of the teacher about complexity and active construction of knowledge.

Pupils’ beliefs affect the self-regulatory strategies they use. Muis (2007) developed a model to show how epistemic beliefs (an individual’s beliefs about the nature of knowledge) can influence the self-regulation. Muis (2007) places the activation of epistemic beliefs in the forethought phase (task definition phase) of the self-regulated learning cycle, when prior content knowledge and other beliefs are activated. Thus, epistemic beliefs have an effect on what goals the pupils set and what strategies they choose to achieve those goals.

A relation between teacher beliefs, teacher practices and pupil beliefs (and in turn, pupils’ self-regulation) exists, but there is a lack of knowledge of the factors influencing this relation. The empirical study presented in this thesis explores these factors. According to Muis and Foy (2010) teachers’ instructional and assessment strategies might have a significant role in mediating the connection between teacher and pupil beliefs. Muis and Foy (2010) recommend further research that includes observation of the types of instructional strategies the teachers use combined with in-depth interviews with the teachers and pupils to uncover their beliefs. Dignath-van Ewijk and van der Werf (2012) concluded that because of the connection between pupil and teacher beliefs, it is important that when researching how teachers promote self-regulated learning also teachers’ beliefs are considered, not only teacher behavior.
2.1.2.2 Tasks

Task characteristics can influence the goals learners set, the strategies they engage in and their self-motivational beliefs. Some task dimensions (such as variety, meaningfulness, etc.) have been associated with the adoption of mastery goals (i.e. focusing on mastering task, focus on learning and understanding, see Pintrich, 2000). In classrooms that emphasize competition and include repetitive tasks pupils are more likely to engage in tasks superficially (Paris, Byrnes, & Paris, 2001).

Turner (1995) differentiated between two types of tasks based on what kind of approaches they foster: open-ended tasks include projects for example, and require pupils to research and interpret, while closed tasks include worksheets and require for example memorization and little creativity. Perry, Phillips and Dowler (2004) suggest that complex tasks that take place over a longer period of time offer pupils more opportunities to engage in self-regulation. In challenging, complex tasks, pupils need to make decisions and choices, which require the use of various strategies as opposed to routine tasks. Paris and Paris (2001) reached a similar conclusion, and suggest that in order to promote self-regulation skills, less emphasis should be placed on workbook exercises and routine tasks.

The researchers mentioned above (Turner, 1995; Perry, Phillips, & Dowler, 2004; Paris & Paris, 2001) defined the characteristic of tasks that require pupils to use self-regulated learning strategies. Pintrich and Schunk (2002), on the other hand, pointed out the importance of task meaningfulness and authenticity, as ways of increasing pupils motivation and interest, which in turn leads to a higher-level of engagement in the task.

Complex and challenging tasks might seem overwhelming, even though they are meaningful, if the pupils do not have the necessary skills to tackle them. Perry et al. (2004) found that teachers in high self-regulated learning classrooms ensure that pupils have both the necessary strategy and content knowledge to approach the tasks assigned independently.

2.1.2.3 Environment

Besides task characteristics and teacher beliefs, also other elements of the classroom environment affect the self-regulatory processes the pupils use. Closely related to task assignment, evaluation practices influence learners’ self-regulatory processes. Researchers provide guidelines to assessment practices that promote self-regulation. Stating assessment criteria clearly when assigning the task could help pupils set appropriate goals and self-assess accurately (Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2014). Reducing the amount of competitive
tests and public comparisons while increasing the assessment based on projects and portfolios can motivate pupils (Paris & Paris, 2001). According to Perry et al. (2004, p. 1856), teachers in high self-regulated learning classrooms use “nonthreatening evaluation practices that encourage pupils to focus on personal progress”.

General classroom climate also affects self-regulation. Pintrich and Schunk (2002) define classroom climate as the general atmosphere of the classroom, including its social, psychological, and emotional characteristics. The classroom climate becomes apparent from teacher-pupil interactions and the way learning activities are organized. Democratic leadership (i.e. encouraging pupils to share ideas, pupil decision making, fair and consistent rules) and a constructivist classroom design (which includes: pupils’ active participants in their learning process, choices in tasks, using authentic tasks, etc.) provide a suitable environment for promoting self-regulation. When examining teachers beliefs about self-regulated learning, Dignath-van Ewijk and van der Werf (2012) found that teachers have a more positive attitude towards constructivist ideas than towards self-regulated learning, and they mentioned characteristics of constructivist environment as a way to support self-regulation more readily than others (e.g. strategy instruction).

In this section, Zimmerman’s self-regulated learning models have been presented (figure 1 and 2, table 1), focusing on the social-cognitive view on self-regulated learning and the way self-regulated learning can be promoted in the classroom context: through beliefs, task choices and environment. Panadero and Alonso-Tapia (2014) presented a review of Zimmerman’s self-regulated model, and discussed the processes and self-motivational beliefs activated in each phase in detail. For this reason in the upcoming sections the work of Panadero and Alonso-Tapia is used when discussing the self-regulatory processes.

### 2.2 Homework

Homework is defined as “tasks assigned to pupils by school teacher that are meant to be carried out during non-instructional time” (Cooper, 1989). Homework is complex in nature: it involves the parents, pupils, teachers, and it is set both in the classroom and in the home environment (see figure 3).
The first years of schooling are crucial because this is when children establish attitudes towards learning (Hendy & Whitebread, 2000). Negligence, incompetence and poor attitude have been noted to cause homework problems, and tardiness and lack of interest were found to be the main reasons for homework incompletion (Hong et al., 2011). On the other hand, children have the opportunity to use a variety of strategies while doing homework (monitoring motivation and emotion, arranged environment), and these are often modeled from adults (Xu & Corno, 1998).

2.2.1 Teachers’ influence

Primary school teachers play an important role in shaping the development of children’s attitude towards school and learning in general and towards homework in particular. Teachers are in charge of how they assign homework, the amount they assign and what they assign. For this reason Epstein (1988, p. 16) calls homework a “manipulable variable”. Cooper (1989) lists a number of variables that may influence homework. Amongst these teacher practices refer not only to homework design, but also to ways that homework is assigned, the consequences of not having done homework, the purpose of giving homework, does the teacher have clear goals, their beliefs about the usefulness of homework and general teaching “philosophy”. Xu and Corno (1998) list a number of factors that
influence how children approach homework. These include how homework is assigned and evaluated as well as the teacher’s expectations towards what the child and parent should do. Epstein and Voorhis (2001) collected ten purposes of teachers giving homework, and discussed how the different purposes can influence the homework process. Epstein and Voorhis (2001) consider that there is still a lot to learn about homework, for example how different designs affect the development of different skills.

2.2.2 Parents’ role in homework

As homework lies at the intersection of school and home, many studies focused on how parents are involved in the homework process, what the optimal parental involvement in homework is. Xu and Corno (1998) found that parent involvement influences the psychological effects of homework on children, and parents can help pupils develop self-regulation skills. The type of help initially received from parents can determine how the child does homework later on its own.

Following this line of research, the TIPS process for homework design was developed by Epstein & Voorhis (2001). TIPS stands for Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork, and aims for assigning interactive homework tasks that require pupils to collaborate with their families or community. TIPS process represents just one of the ways parents can get involved with homework. Another set of guidelines for beneficial parental involvement were presented by Cooper in an interview (Bembenutty, 2011b), which involve parents taking on the following roles: stage manager, motivator, role model, monitor and mentor.

2.2.3 Pupils’ views on homework

Early studies on homework (Cooper, 1989; Epstein, 1988) were mainly concerned with homework completion, academic achievement and time spent on homework. These early studies are quantitative in nature and use questionnaires as tools for data collection. However, in many cases these tools did not uncover all the aspects of homework: for instance, Epstein (1983) found that simply looking at the time spent on homework and pupil achievement is not enough to evaluate when homework is effective in teaching and learning. In a meta-analysis of homework studies, Cooper, Robinson, & Patall (2006) found that homework completion is related with higher achievement in the case of high school and college students, but not in elementary school children.
Another line of research was trying to gain a deeper understanding of the complex world of homework through qualitative research. In the early 2000s, researchers noticed the lack of research on pupils’ voices (Coutts, 2004; Warton, 2001), and soon a series of studies emerged that focused on discovering pupils’, parents’ and teachers perceptions of homework (Bempechat et al., 2011; Letterman, 2013; Warton, 1997, 2001; Xu & Corno, 1998; Xu & Yuan, 2003). Research focusing on pupils’ voices showed that pupils often find homework boring and useless, and pupils often do not feel responsible for their homework (Warton, 1997) or homework experience is not a positive one for pupils.

Xu & Corno (1998) found that pupils were not aware of the personal development function of homework, and they were only mildly aware of homework’s benefit for schoolwork. Coutts’ (2004) results are similar, the elementary school children in her study also did not recognize the positive outcomes mentioned by parents. This disagreement between children’s and adults’ view was confirmed also by Xu & Yuan (2003), although their study focused on middle school children. Letterman (2013) conducted a study with university pupils, and he found that the pupils recognized the importance of homework, if they considered it meaningful. Letterman noted that because in high school homework had a negative connotation, incoming freshman still held this belief in college.

Based on the four studies mentioned in the previous paragraph it would seem that children do not recognize the benefits of homework, but as they get older, they start adopting the adult viewpoint, and recognize the long-term benefits of homework. Clear communication between pupils and parents/teachers about the benefit and meaning of homework could help bridge this gap, and eventually lead to pupils completing the homework “willingly and in good spirit” (Coutts, 2004, p. 184).

As mentioned earlier, homework has not been found to affect academic achievement in primary school children (Cooper et al., 2006). However, homework can still be beneficial in helping pupils develop self-regulation and independent learning skills, if a number of variables are aligned right. In the next section a short overview of the research on homework and self-regulated learning will be presented, focusing on the guidelines researchers set out for fostering self-regulation through homework.
2.3 Fostering self-regulation through homework

Self-regulatory processes and beliefs develop over time and with repeated practice (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011). Homework offers the time and experience needed for developing study habits and achievement beliefs (Bempechat, 2004). As opposed to school, where their learning is often regulated by the teacher and policies (breaks, schedule), during the completion of homework the pupils themselves have the opportunity to do so.

In the last few years there has been research focusing also on how pupils’ own skills and beliefs influence their homework and academic achievement (Bembenutty, 2009; Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 2008). It has been found that self-efficacious, intrinsically interested pupils with positive outcome expectations are more likely to adopt adaptive self-regulatory approaches (Bembenutty, 2009). Also students’ self-efficacy for learning and perceived responsibility have been indirectly linked to their achievement through homework in a quantitative study by Kitsantas & Zimmerman (2008). The implications of this study are that supporting students’ homework completion leads to increased self-efficacy beliefs, which lead to students taking more responsibility for their academic progress (Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 2008).

As developing adaptive study habits can be considered one of the main positive outcomes of homework completion, according to Ramdass & Zimmerman (2011), the quality of homework is best measured based on self-regulatory processes and beliefs: for example, how well students manage distractions, their perceived responsibility and self-efficacy beliefs, and the use of certain strategies, like goal-setting, self-reflection or time management.

There are several factors that influence the extent in which homework supports the development of self-regulation, such as the beliefs and practices of adults and the assignment itself. Bempechat (2004, p. 195) points out that homework provides the opportunity to develop these beliefs and behaviors “under the guidance of adults who challenge their intellectual growth”; and research has shown that homework assignments impact pupils’ self-regulatory development (Bembenutty, 2009; Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 2008).

Certain homework assignments can “make some pupils avoid rather than enjoy schoolwork” (Corno, 1996, p. 29), while others can help pupils develop better study habits and self-regulation skills and to foster positive attitudes toward school more than others.
If the tasks assigned as homework are not appropriate for the pupil or the pupil has low self-efficacy beliefs and has not developed effective self-regulation skills, the pupil might engage in maladaptive homework practices (Bembenutty, 2011a). In this case, the quality of homework will suffer, and the pupil will not benefit from doing homework. However, if the homework is appropriate and pupils are encouraged to self-regulate their learning, doing homework will affect their self-regulatory development in a positive way, and having better self-regulatory skills and beliefs will lead to even better quality of homework.

Based on research evidence, the conditions for homework assignments that support self-regulation include:

- Assignments that are adjustable by the pupils to fit their interest and achievement level (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011).
- Solving the tasks requires only a short amount of time, and choices in tasks are offered, as this can increase intrinsic motivation (Bembenutty, 2011b).
- Whenever possible, pupils will participate in the process of setting the assignments (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011).
- The assignments given are meaningful (see Bembenutty, 2011a for a list of principles for meaningful homework).
- Assignments are engaging and interesting to improve pupils’ self-efficacy beliefs and feeling of responsibility (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011).
- The tasks offered should be challenging, to stimulate pupil engagement (Cooper, Horn, & Strahan, 2005).

These points are just recommendations, Corno (1996, p. 28) explains that an expert teacher adjusts the amount, content and type of assignments to his pupils’ “capabilities and needs” at the moment, without adhering to any strict rules, policies or regular homework schedules.

When they start school, children might have an idea about knowledge and learning, but as they encounter academic tasks and methods of evaluation, they develop more concrete concepts about the nature of academic tasks and learning (Paris et al., 2001). In schools
teachers are responsible for designing the classroom environment, choosing tasks and methods of assessment. Homework tasks are solved and assigned daily, so what the teacher values when assessing, the types of tasks he assigns and the purpose he has in mind when assigning homework all influence the way children think about homework and how they approach the task.

There is research dating back decades that shows that teachers’ beliefs influence their practices (Pajares, 1992). When Perry et al. (2004) researched how novice teachers can be trained with the help of expert teachers to promote self-regulated learning in the classroom, an important part of the process was when teachers shared their thoughts and examined their beliefs and how they influenced their actions. Teacher beliefs influence their practices, and teachers shape the classroom environment through their practices (i.e. task choices, classroom climate, assessment methods, types of interactions, etc.). There is also research to suggest that the classroom environment and the tasks pupils are exposed to shape their epistemic beliefs (Muis & Foy, 2010, p. 437). Because of this close relation between teacher and student beliefs, teachers who wish to train their students’ self-regulated learning strategies and beliefs need to possess high self-efficacy beliefs themselves (Bembenutty, 2009).

As shown in this section, there are several aspects of the classroom environment that affect pupils’ beliefs and self-regulated learning: how homework is assigned and assessed, how the teacher perceives the purpose of homework. Many researchers have formulated guidelines for instructors that would help them choose the right homework tasks to foster self-regulated learning skills (Bembenutty, 2011a, 2011b; Cooper, 1989). However, there is a lack of studies that would explore what other elements influence students’ self-regulation of homework, such as classroom environment and teacher beliefs. In the following sections and empirical study is presented that aims at filling this gap.
3 Methods

3.1 Aim and research questions

The purpose of this study is to explore to what extent and in what ways do teachers support pupils’ self-regulation through homework. As mentioned above, homework offers an opportunity for children to practice and develop self-regulated learning skills, however only if the tasks and the pupils’ attitude and approach are appropriate. The aim is to discover the ways teachers can set the ground for the development of self-regulated learning skills through homework. Through considering teachers’ homework related practices and beliefs and how children perceive these and how they approach homework, this research might contribute to the wider research on how to promote self-regulation skills in schools. The research questions are:

1. How do teachers and pupils conceptualize homework?
2. How do teachers’ task choices influence pupils’ self-regulatory processes?
3. What are the elements of the classroom environment that affect homework and how do pupils relate to them?

3.2 Methodology

This thesis uses qualitative research methods, which focus on “observing, describing, interpreting and analyzing the way that people experience, act on, or think about themselves and the world around them” (Bazeley, 2013, p. 4). Qualitative researchers look beyond numbers and variables and attempt to place people in the center of analysis. Their goal is to understand the intricacies of the human condition, focusing on the quality of experiences rather than quantifying them (Bazeley, 2013).

A qualitative approach allows the researcher to look at a phenomenon from different perspectives. A common feature of qualitative research is to look for an insider viewpoint in order to gain an insight of the issue at hand from the participant’s perspective. People are able to share how they experienced a certain event, which reveals their own personal, situated reality. A qualitative researcher needs to be able to think critically in order to attempt
to identify the complex network of causes and effect, the intricate relations between events
and personal processes in a certain context (Bazeley, 2013).

In qualitative analysis, the emphasis is on discovering the relations between different fea-
tures and causes within a certain instance of a phenomenon. Based on this argument, Ba-
zeley considers that “qualitative analysis is fundamentally case oriented” (2013, p. 5).

The research strategy used in this thesis is case study. This method was chosen as the re-
search aims to answer “how” questions about a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life
context (Yin, 1994). According to Yin (1994, p. 13), a case study is “an empirical study
that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”.

This case study aims at investigating homework as an opportunity for pro-
moting self-regulation. Data is collected from both teachers and pupils, fulfilling another
requirement of case studies, that is that the research should rely on multiple sources of evi-
dence (Yin, 1994). The analysis follows an abductive approach, which leads to a plausible
interpretation of the results, as it involves “an iterative interplay between existing theoreti-
cal understanding and empirical data, so that the theory is recontextualized” (Bazeley,
2013, p. 336).

Choosing a qualitative approach in general, and a case study method in particular for this
research suits the aim of this study and allows the exploration of how two different groups
(pupils and teachers) view and experience the same phenomenon (homework).

### 3.3 Participants

The participants of the study were two primary school teachers and fourth grade pupils
(N = 13, 11 females and 2 males, aged 11) from an urban area school in Romania. All pu-
pils are raised in two-parent households, in nine families at least one of the parents has
higher education, and all parents except one mother are working full-time. The names of
the children were changed to protect their privacy.

The participants were chosen because of accessibility and because the pupils were taught
by the same three teachers since first grade. This was important for the study as it meant
that pupils were exposed only to a limited amount of teachers during their academic expe-
rience. The three teachers were a regular primary school teacher who teaches all subjects
except English and Religion, an English language teacher, and a religion teacher. Both the primary school teacher and the English teacher were included in the study, and from now on they will be referred to as primary teacher and English teacher. The religion teacher was contacted but not included in the study as she reported not to give any homework and had met the pupils only for one hour every week.

The primary teacher has completed the primary teacher training 15 years ago, and has been teaching ever since. During those years he completed two university degree programs, one in history and one in ecological geography. He completed the highest qualification available for teachers in Romania (called “grade one” certificate) four years ago. He is passionate about his job and enjoys discovering new teaching methods and planning various activities for his pupils outside the classroom.

The English teacher got her master’s degree in a double specialization: Geography-English in 2008. She recalled that she wanted to be an English teacher since she was a child, and she felt that she was good at teaching from an early age. The English teacher aims to create a friendly atmosphere in the classroom, helping her pupils to handle the more difficult parts of the lesson by including lighter tasks also. She finds that the text books are a very valuable resource that she can built her lessons around, but she has difficulty reacting to all the different needs of the pupils in a classroom.

### 3.4 Data collection

The data mainly consists of open-ended interviews collected from the teachers and pupils over a period of two weeks in June 2013. Children were interviewed on two consecutive days. The individual interviews with the students ranged between 7 and 20 minutes in length, with the average length of 10 minutes. The teacher interviews’ duration was 19 minutes for the English teacher and 24 minutes for the Primary teacher.

Interviews were chosen as the main data as they allow an insight into how teachers and pupils conceptualize homework and what kind of meanings they associate with it. During the interviews teachers were asked to describe the reasons they give homework, the types of tasks they assign and when, problems with homework and how they assign and assess homework. Pupils were asked questions that focused on their homework habits, their reasons for doing homework, tasks that they liked or disliked and what their general attitude
was towards homework. They were also asked about their teachers’ reason for giving homework and the classroom practices.

Additional data collected includes background information about the pupil’s social circumstances, the primary teacher’s rating of the interviewed pupils’ homework quality and regularity and information about the two teachers’ professional background.

3.5 Analysis

The data analysis consisted of three phases (as seen on the figure below): 1) transcribing data and finding the main themes occurring in the data; 2) reviewing previous literature and defining sub-categories and finally, 3) coding all the data under the categories and sub-categories. During the analysis the data coded under different categories was constantly monitored, and in some cases new categories were formed from large categories. NVivo software was used during the analysis. The process of analysis is described in more detail in this section.

In the first stage, the interviews were transcribed and translated to English to make the following stages of analysis easier. This process allowed a greater insight in the data, and during this process, three re-occurring themes were identified:
1. Expressing homework related beliefs: is homework important, why is it good/bad, what is its purpose, reasons for completing it

2. Comments related to homework assignments, what kind of tasks are assigned, strategies pupils use, emotional responses to different types of assignments

3. Information about the classroom environment: how is the homework assigned, assessed

The data was coded under these three categories. During coding a fourth category emerged: home environment. Comments about how parents are involved in the homework solving process, comparisons between the conditions for learning at home and in school formed a fourth category. Although considering parental involvement was initially not within the scope of this thesis, as it appeared often in the data, it is discussed in the results.

In the second stage, existing literature on homework perceptions was surveyed to help define the subcategories. The categories for the purposes of homework from Epstein and Voorhis (2001) were included as subcategories for homework beliefs. Although in the article by Epstein and Voorhis (2001) these categories are used to describe purposes for giving homework, they were also found to coincide with purposes of doing homework, as seen from the pupils’ perspective.

As the coding progressed, there was a new category emerging from the references coded under “homework assignments”. The strategies children used, expressions of interest and motivation were included under a new category called “Learning strategies and self-motivation beliefs”. The subcategories for this category are based on the review of the self-regulated learning model of Zimmerman by Panadero and Alonso-Tapia (Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2014).

The main categories and subcategories that emerged after the second stage of coding and literature review were used in the third phase of analysis and are described in table 2.
Table 2. Coding categories and subcategories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coding category</th>
<th>Subcategories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homework beliefs</td>
<td>Purposes of homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disadvantages of homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework assignments</td>
<td>Homework tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homework difficulty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Homework quantity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom environment</td>
<td>Assigning homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assessing homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Classroom climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home environment</td>
<td>Parental involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Atmosphere at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning strategies and self-motivation beliefs</td>
<td>Forethought phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Performance phase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-reflection phase</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of the subcategories described above have further categories that are described in the results section. This lowest level of subcategories was introduced to describe the themes appearing in the data with a greater level of detail. The complete coding book with the definition of the codes can be found in appendix 1 and 2. After the third phase, the final coding, each category was analyzed separately as presented in the results section. The relations between the subcategories are considered in the discussion section that follows, where the research questions are answered.
4 Results

In this section the results will be presented structured according to the categories they were coded in. After the third stage of analysis, the final coding, there were five main categories: homework beliefs, homework assignments, classroom environment, home environment and lastly learning strategies and self-motivation beliefs. The answers to the research questions come from interpreting the findings from two or more of these categories, and for this reason it is needed that first all the main findings are presented according to the main coding categories. In the following, the five main coding categories are presented, as well as the sub-categories associated with them.

4.1 Homework beliefs

Data was coded under homework beliefs if it contained information about the purposes of giving or doing homework or the importance of homework. In this section the focus is on what the teachers think the purpose of homework is, in parallel with what children recognize as the purpose of homework. The disadvantages of homework mentioned by the interview subjects are also discussed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories in Homework beliefs</th>
<th>Number of total references coded</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Number of pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of homework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal development</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for the future</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1 (primary teacher)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn new things</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1 (primary teacher)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1 (primary teacher)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1 (primary teacher)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-child relations</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 (primary teacher)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 (English teacher)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disadvantages</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Homework beliefs were coded in two categories: purposes of homework and disadvantages of homework. The purposes of homework were further categorized in eight different subcategories. Table 3 shows the number of pupils and teachers who expressed ideas coded in these categories, as well as the total number of references coded under each category.

4.1.1 Purpose of homework

The items coded in this category come from answers to particular questions. Teachers’ answers to: ‘why do you give homework’, and pupils’ answers to the questions ‘why do you think your teacher gives you homework’ and ‘why do you think homework is good/bad’ were mostly coded in this category. The purposes of homework defined by Epstein and Voorhis (2001) were used as a starting point in categorizing the purposes mentioned. Eight different purposes of homework were mentioned, from which six were mentioned by both pupils and teachers, one purpose only by the English teacher and one by the pupils. Not all purposes of homework listed by Epstein and Voorhis (2001) were found in the data, and some purposes found in the data did not coincide with the purposes of homework listed by Epstein and Voorhis (2001). The reason for this might be the fact that Epstein and Voorhis (2001) defined the purposes based on interviews with only teachers. In the following the purposes of homework are discussed in more detailed.

4.1.1.1 Personal development

The purpose of homework most widely mentioned was personal development. This purpose is defined by Epstein and Voorhis (2001) as "to build pupil responsibility, honesty, perseverance, time management, self-confidence". Nine out of the thirteen pupils mentioned personal development as the purpose of homework, as well as both teachers.

To the question what purpose does assigning homework have, the primary teacher emphasized the importance of children feeling responsible for a task:

"(I give homework) to make them aware of the fact that they have a task. And that they will have a task at home. That you cannot just do some task anywhere, but that you have a task, a job, work to do. So they realize that when they grow up they will have tasks, responsibilities ... Even when they will grow up, they will have a workplace and home. They have to fulfill certain obligations in both. Of course even nowadays many of them do some simple chores at home. But even at work, sometimes they won't be
able to finish everything during work hours. Nowadays workplaces are deadline and goal driven. You have to complete a target until a deadline, or you're fired. So I give homework especially for this. (primary teacher)

The English teacher also emphasized the personal responsibility for doing homework. In her opinion, the main purpose of homework is to “offer an opportunity for pupils to get organized and methodic, to regularly have to do something”. The English teacher mentioned homework also as an opportunity to practice self-assessment: “Often they cannot assess themselves correctly. They might think that they know more or less than they actually do. Homework can help them realize that”. Self-assessment during homework can be also the source of feeling of success: “if I ask them to start with a very difficult topic, it doesn't work. But if they start with what they like and know, they are like, ok, I managed to do these, there are only three more left” (English teacher).

Homework having the purpose of establishing the feeling of responsibility is also recognized by the pupils. When asked why she thinks her teacher gives her homework, Bella explained:

(He gives us homework) so we would learn that we are also responsible for something. I think homework is mainly for me, because I learn from it, and it teaches me that I have to be ready in time. (Bella)

Both in the Primary teacher’s and in Bella’s quote time management is mentioned in addition to responsibility. Time management appear also within other pupils’ transcriptions. Melanie mentions that getting a lot of homework allows the pupils to schedule their time: “For example 10 minutes we do math, 10 minutes we read, and so on”.

Emma also mentions that having homework gives a purpose to her free time: “I enjoy when I get homework, because then you know that you have to work, and that's a good feeling. You know that you don't just sit around during the weekend, watching TV the whole day. You know that you have to do the homework anyway, and you will only watch TV afterwards”. Having the responsibility of doing homework appears also as a way to avoid boredom. Isabella and Ben both mention this, for example, Ben thinks the teacher gives them homework “So we wouldn't just sit around and be bored, but that we would have some work to do”.
Besides encouraging responsibility, building self-confidence and improving time-management skills another re-occurring aspect of personal development mentioned by pupils is the development of study skills through homework. Ben thinks they get homework so they “would learn how to study properly on our own, too”, and Melanie thinks that doing homework alone helps her develop “self-confidence”. Mia talks about homework as a tool for self-assessment in a similar way as the English teacher: “it's important that we do it (i.e. homework), because then we know what we learnt already and what not”.

Personal development as the purpose of homework is present in the data as Epstein and Voorhis (2001, p. 182) defined it, as the purpose to develop “responsibility, perseverance, time management, self-confidence, and feelings of accomplishment”; but besides, homework is also thought to help develop other learning skills, including self-assessment and organizational skills.

4.1.1.2 Practice

According to Epstein and Voorhis (2001) the purpose of practice can be defined as having the purpose "to increase speed, mastery or maintenance of skills". Eight pupils and both teachers mention practice as the perceived purpose of homework.

The Primary Teacher has contradicting opinions on the subject. At first he says he claims that “I don't think that for learning or practicing it's (homework is) appropriate”, however at a later point he says about handwriting skills that “more practice is needed. Not a lot, but a bit of writing every day”. The English teacher also supports the idea that one of the purposes of homework tasks is practice, and the tasks are always similar to what already has been done in class.

Pupils do mention practice as a purpose of homework they receive: “we practiced with homework” (Kathie), “(we get homework) So we can practice at home” (Kayla). Many of them mention practicing when asked about preferred homework tasks, or homework tasks they would assign themselves. “I prefer to practice what we did in school” (Bella), “For example here in school we are practicing something. And if I would do it also at home, it would be easier” (Melanie), “if we do it in class, and then at home, then it becomes easier. We practice more” (David).
4.1.1.3  Preparation for the future
This category cannot be found amongst the purposes listed by Epstein and Voorhis (2001). It contains references to the purpose of homework being the preparation for fifth grade or some major test.

The primary teacher expressed external reasons for giving homework:

When you’re a beginner teacher you want to do a thorough job, so you give more homework. Or in fourth grade you give a lot to prepare them for the fifth grade. And then you give them a lot, so they can feel how fifth grade will feel like, so they won't be overwhelmed then. (primary teacher)

Some of the pupils’ answers to the question “Why do you think your teacher gives you homework” reflected this external pressure that the primary teacher described: “sometimes we get a lot of homework, and he (the teacher) doesn't give that because it makes him feel better to see us suffer, but because it helps us prepare” (Emma). According to Kayla the teacher assigns homework “sometimes also because he has to“.

This homework purpose was associated with homework quantity. According to the interviewed children in the fifth grade they will get more homework compared to primary school, have more to write and the teachers “won't take into consideration how much homework the other teacher gave, and they will all give a lot” (Ella) and “will be stricter with grades” (Zoe).

Many of the pupils are aware that the purpose of an increased amount of homework now is to prepare them for the fifth grade: “the teacher gives more now in fourth grade to help us prepare for the fifth grade “(Emma), “from fifth grade we will have more homework, and we have to get used to it” (Ella).

4.1.1.4  Learn new things
The name of this category comes from the interview of Zoe. The characteristic of this category is that the purpose of homework being that of learning new things is only recognized by the pupils. The Primary teacher has an opposing opinion: “I never ask them to do anything new or very difficult at home”.

However, there are eight references to this purpose from four of the pupils. Ella and Zoe give concrete examples and mention learning new words or during a reading task they
learn something new about nature, how “this butterfly is different from that”, while other pupils mention learning more things, finding out new things.

4.1.1.5 Preparation
This category includes homework "designed to stimulate pupils’ thinking about a topic" in preparation for next lesson, as defined by Epstein and Voorhis (2001). Within this category homework is described as an introduction to the next lesson, as an occasion to activate pupils’ previous knowledge on the next lesson’s subject. The primary teacher mentions this purpose in relation to pupils not having done their homework: “Then you get a bit mad, because you were planning on building the class on the homework. Or you wanted to do something related to that. But then you realize that half of the class didn't do it, and you cannot do what you've planned”.

Comments from four pupils are included in this category, but their opinions are divided. For Ben there is no difference in how he can participate in class whether he has done his homework or no, but for Melanie homework “also helps. For example when we work in school we can relate it to our homework”. Zoe and Mia would prefer to receive homework related to things that they will learn in near future because “Then when we would learn about it in class, it would be easier to follow” (Mia).

4.1.1.6 Challenge
Challenging pupils as the purpose of homework assignments appears in four sources: three pupils and the primary teacher. This purpose is not listed in previous literature, however it is emphasized so strongly by the above-mentioned participants and it could not be included in any of the other categories.

The primary teacher believes that “They should have a little, but something that makes them think a bit”. At another instance, he adds: “sometimes I give them tasks that make them think, that they have to sit and think about for half an hour - don't take that literally. But if they don't sit 10 minutes next to it thinking, then you can't solve it. Because you shouldn't just solve exercises having the same pattern at home”.

The pupils’ responses in the same category come from answers they gave to the question what kind of homework do you prefer or what kind of homework would you give yourself. Emma said that “I would give myself these mathematic exercises… Where you have to think a lot, but you can still figure out the solution”. Olivia says that she finds mathematics
homework refreshing because “it makes you think, you have to rack your brains to come up with a solution. There are some tasks that I really don't like, and I think that they cannot even be solved, but then I sit and think and think, sometimes even for 15 minutes, and then I manage to do it”.

4.1.1.7 Parent-child relations

According to Epstein and Voorhis (2001, p. 182) homework can “promote positive communications between parent and child”. This category includes instances when the purpose of homework was mentioned to be increasing communication between parent and child or involving home in any way in the learning process. The Primary Teacher phrases this purpose clearly:

> It's good if the parent knows about what's happening in the school, not only through parent-teacher meetings. They can see what we are talking about in school. And perhaps homework gives a good opportunity for discussion. There are very few who will ask their children "what have you been doing in school?" or "let's see what you were doing in school". But if they have a glance at their homework, they will see that now they've been discussing fractions or they read this story. (primary teacher)

In the pupils’ transcript this category appears only in superficial comments about the purpose of homework being able to learn at home, too, in addition to school.

4.1.1.8 Other

There was one homework purpose mentioned by the English teacher that did not fit in any other categories: “shouldn't have checked their knowledge with that kind of homework task”. In this case homework appears to be an assessment tool in itself, the English teacher meant to assess the progress of the pupils through homework.

4.1.2 Disadvantages of homework

There are ten references to homework being presented in a negative way within the data. Seven of the ten come from the teachers. Both teachers discuss the phenomena of some pupils not completing homework regularly. They are “always the same children who don't do their homework. This already starts in the first or second grade and it just continues: they cannot get over this” (Primary teacher). Zoe confirms this: “these days everyone does their homework, except those who regularly don't do it”. According to the primary teacher
parents are the key in disrupting this trend, initially “the control is required from the parent's side. Even just to ask, let's see what you have been doing in school. If the child feels that they only pay attention occasionally, he will take advantage of it. And of course, with this he only hurts himself, and perhaps the parent, because you can notice a serious setback in their development”.

The primary teacher emphasized on several occasions that “there are much more important things than homework”. One of the things more important than homework in his opinion is time spent with family: “I'm not convinced (that homework is important). I think the system is a bit stupid. For example if they have guests at home in the afternoon, then the poor child gets stressed … he doesn't have time to do what's more important, for example to go out with the family”.

There are only a few instances of pupils mentioning drawbacks of homework: some tasks are boring (David), sometimes it’s tiring and it “takes away the freedom of children” (Melanie).

In this section the homework beliefs of teachers and pupils have been presented. Beliefs about homework are a major theme within the data, with 82 references coded in it from all the interview subjects. Within purposes of homework, the most mentioned purpose was personal development. Developing skills like time and environment management, self-assessment and responsibility through homework was recognized both by teachers and by pupils, closely followed by practice. Preparation for the future and challenge are purposes that are unique to this data and do not appear in the coding system adopted (Epstein & Voorhis, 2001) When talking about disadvantages of homework the primary teacher pointed out the case when always the same children do not complete homework and talked about the stress evoking nature of homework, both issues mentioned also by pupils.

4.2 Homework assignments

This category includes descriptions of specific homework tasks, mentions of quantity and difficulty level of the homework assignments in general. Pupils were asked during the interviews to tell about what kind of homework tasks they get, what they prefer or dislike, what they find difficult or easy and if they think that the amount of homework they get is appropriate. Teachers mentioned concrete examples of tasks in relation with purposes of
homework, when asked to describe the types of task they give and within answers to various other questions. The tasks were categorized based on the type of activity into six categories: reading, writing, exercises, projects, crafts, other. The table below shows the number of teachers and pupils who expressed ideas coded in these categories, as well as the total number of references coded under each category.

Table 4. Frequency of references in homework assignments category and its subcategories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories in homework assignments</th>
<th>Number of coding references</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Number of pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homework tasks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercises</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1 (primary teacher)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1 (primary teacher)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crafts</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 (English teacher)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework Difficulty</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework Quantity</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.1 Homework tasks

This category contains all comments related to specific homework tasks. It includes references that describe specific homework tasks. The homework tasks are categorized in six categories: writing, exercises, projects, reading, crafts and other.

4.2.1.1 Writing tasks

The most commonly mentioned task types were the writing tasks. The primary teacher mentioned his opinion about writing tasks:

*I tried to give creative tasks, small essays to write, we had that a lot ... I always tried to give topics that are more interesting, and open. A lot of why questions, for example: why does the kangaroo jump? That was a stupid example, but that could be a topic as well. Or since when do we cook gulyas. In these they have to explore reasons and consequences, they have to come up with a fictional reason for something that doesn't really have a reason. They came and read it every class, and enjoyed it a lot. I feel like for developing writings skills these tasks are the best. (primary teacher)*
The children gave many examples of writing tasks. These usually consisted of small essays to write. Pupils recalled many different writing tasks: “we had to write a recipe for a magic potion. I remember that we had it when we learnt about herbs.” (Bella); “we had to write an essay about being a time traveler. You could go back or forward in time.” (Kayla); “We had to write an essay … The title was: dream within a dream” (Melanie); “we had to write about an imaginary town”; “we had to write an essay about time travel, or about who dwarf is” (Zoe); “we had to do a comic strip” (Amelia)

When recalling homework tasks pupils expressed also emotions like: “I really enjoyed that” or “that was really nice”. Olivia explains that she really likes essays because “I can phrase my thoughts. And it makes me think. It's like the whole task is about using logic”. The teacher is aware of this attitude: “if you give some creative task, they like that, and they do with pleasure”. However, some pupils associated writing tasks with having to write a lot and being tired, an aspect also mentioned by the primary teacher: “If there's an essay, you sit down, and for some people it goes easy, and for some not. If it doesn't go so easily, in those cases someone has to push them a bit”.

4.2.1.2 Exercises
The tasks coded under the category “Exercise” included any mentioning of worksheets, workbook and textbook exercises. Although worksheets, workbooks and textbook might contain reading or writing tasks, a separate category was created for these because the way the pupils were mentioning them. These sources of exercises appear near words such as repetitive, boring, meaningless, and easy.

The primary teacher expresses how meaningless repetitive exercises are: “It's not like if you give them 10 multiplications or additions to solve. Then it's the same thing over and over again. But if it's something more interesting than 5*3, then it's different. It's not boring”. Ben echoes this opinion, saying that “Sometimes we get these exercises that are all the same, and we have to do the same thing 50 times all over. It's when we have to do all the exercises from the book from this page to that…we should get useful and meaningful tasks. Those repetitive ones don't have any point”. However, the English teacher associates the textbook with colorful content and takes worksheets to her pupils often: “I also take worksheets to them. The book might be good, but there are parts that I consider more important, or I see that the pupils are more interested in a topic. I was copying a lot of
papers”. Some pupils also appreciate worksheets, Zoe and Kathie both mentioned work-
sheets when asked what kind of homework they would give themselves.

4.2.1.3  Projects

Tasks included under projects are complex tasks including information seeking, filtering
found information and presenting the results in form of a poster or presentation. Project is
the denomination used by the teacher and the pupil for these kinds of tasks. Emma explains
the complex nature of project like tasks: “you can write, but you also find out more about
something. Usually we pick something that we don't know much about, and then we find
out more about that thing, and also because it's nice to present that to your colleagues”.

The primary teacher expressed his views on assigning this kind of tasks:

(I give project) quite often. Not just from history, from geography, sciences, and litera-
ture also, depending on the topic we were discussing...It's not boring, you go and
search in books, ask your parents.... These kinds of tasks are meaningful. You get in
touch with someone or something and that will be useful for them. (primary teacher)

Pupils recalled several projects: one time they had to choose a famous person, find infor-
mation about that person and create a poster; another time their task was to create a poster
with the title “protect your environment” and they also mentioned a time when they had to
present different cities.

4.2.1.4  Reading

This category contains tasks requiring pupils to read a text. The texts mentioned in the data
ranged from short articles to books. Only the references to reading assigned as homework
were coded under “reading”, mentions of reading for leisure were not included. The prima-
ry teacher explained that he assigns books “Usually for summer. Rarely during the year,
for the break between the semesters. But mainly for summer”. Pupils mentioned examples
of texts about different science related topics that they were assigned to read (about birds,
geological formations, butterflies). There were also references to having to read whole
books as homework.

4.2.1.5  Crafts

The crafts category includes references to tasks involving drawing or doing some other
type of handicrafts. The English teacher mentions sometimes assigning “creative tasks, like
creating a comic”. Amelia recalled this tasks saying: “when we were younger we had to do
a comic strip, which was really nice”. Other crafts that were mentioned by pupils were making a cardboard clock, a drawing of the class or creating a family tree. The primary teacher explained this last task: “They have to make a presentation about their own family; often they documented it with pictures and stories”.

4.2.1.6 Other

In the other category there are only tasks mentioned by the English teacher that could not be included in any of the previous categories. She mentions speaking exercises, when pupils have to prepare to talk about a given subject at home. For these she provided supporting materials:

To help, I gave them four pages of examples for solved subjects. They were models for how to talk about different subjects in the oral exam. It helped those who didn't have help at home, who didn't have a private tutor. It helped them know how they could talk about their pets, hobbies, such things. (English teacher)

The oral exam is a reference to the entrance exam fourth graders needs to pass if they want to continue in an English intensive class. All fourth graders interviewed applied for this exam.

The English teacher also mentions copying as a homework task: “And, however traditionalist it might sound, I think it's also important to copy texts. For me that helped, and that's why I decided to ask that from my pupils”.

4.2.2 Homework difficulty

Homework difficulty refers to any references to the difficulty level of individual tasks or homework in general. The level of difficulty of different tasks varied a lot on individual level. Learning a poem and mathematic exercises appear within the tasks mentioned to be difficult; writing tasks in general are mentioned often, essays being found difficult by four students. However, it was a common theme that “Some of them are really easy, and some are a bit more difficult to solve. But we can solve them” (Amelia). Mia has the same opinion; she thinks the teacher “doesn't give crazy difficult ones, but neither too easy ones”. This is in line with what the primary teacher said about the difficulty level of tasks: “I never ask them to do anything new or very difficult at home. … Although sometimes I give them tasks that make them think, that they have to sit and think about”.
4.2.3 Homework quantity

All comments on the amount of homework received were coded under this category. There were many comments in this category about the upcoming fifth grade. Pupils are expecting more homework in the fifth grade than they are getting now. The primary teacher also confirmed that next year they will be getting more homework, and that is the reason he increased this year the amount of homework he assigns, however he believes that “Less is more in this case. But then they should know that they will solve that”. The English teacher explained that she gives extra tasks for the weaker and the strongest pupils, to help the weaker ones catch up, and to challenge the strongest.

The pupils seem to agree that “in general we don't have a lot” (Bella). Kathie would like to receive less homework so she would go out and ride her bike earlier, however Emma and Zoe would give themselves more homework if they were their own teachers, “to learn more” and “to be more relaxed in school”. Kayla explains that although she would like to receive less, she trusts the teacher’s judgment: “sometimes I tell myself, that if I were a teacher, I wouldn't give so much homework, but maybe I would… Perhaps if I were a teacher I would know that you cannot give so little. I think the amount the teacher gives is more than enough, so I think I would give the same”.

In this section the homework assignments have been presented, as well as their quantity and difficulty level as seen by the pupils and teachers. In the homework tasks category there were many concrete examples of tasks recalled by the pupils, and explanations from teachers about tasks they find useful for different purposes. Writing tasks were the most mentioned: 25 times by both teachers and nine of the pupils, followed by exercises and projects. Homework difficulty was mentioned on a general level as well as in relation with certain task types. The primary teacher’s personal belief about homework quantity is that less is more. Although some pupils wished they received less homework, they were mostly satisfied with the quantity received.

4.3 Classroom Environment

This category contains the references to how homework tasks are assigned in the classroom, how they are assessed and descriptions of the general classroom climate. The subcategories will be presented in the chronological order of the homework process: assigning
and assessing, and finally the general classroom climate, not in the order of the number of coding references. The table below shows the frequency of references.

Table 5. Frequency of references in classroom environment category and its subcategories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories within classroom environment</th>
<th>Number of coding references</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Number of pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assigning homework</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing homework</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom climate</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.1 Assigning Homework

The references coded under assigning homework are descriptions of how the teacher assigns homework in the classroom: how he explains the tasks, notes children take of the tasks, questions they ask, etc. The primary teacher explains his practice:

*Usually at the end of the class, we put it on the board (the homework)... we have a plastic holder for every subject, and they stay there until the end of the day. Everyone can decide if they want to note it down at the end of the class or the end of the day... Usually just key words: write, read, solve. Abbreviated: w, r, and s. We learn this in the first grade, what you have to do at each abbreviation. And then they know what to do when they see each letter. We have this code system, and based on that they know what to do. I always tell them that they can ask questions. (Primary teacher)*

For the English teacher the time of the assigning is important both the timing within the lesson and during the week. She explains that: “At the university they taught us that we should do it at the end of the lesson. Sometimes it happens that I'm teaching something and then I tell them that they should mark that exercise as homework. But mostly at the end”. She also noticed that over-weekend homework is not the best, “they always have excuses” for not doing the homework. “It's better to give it on Monday, so they'll do it for Tuesday, or how we had classes. This way I'm hearing less excuses” she explains. She also gives more detailed guidelines for bigger tasks: “if we have a project or an essay then according to my experience it's better if I give some specific guidelines: it should contain the name of the author, favorite part, it depends what the task is. This allows them to work more easily, but it also makes assessing it easier”.
Most pupils feel like the teacher explains the task and they can ask questions about it. Kayla explains the process of assigning in detail: “if we get an essay, then I ask in school questions about it, about the topic, and how I have to write it. If we get a task from the book, then we read it in the school together, and talk about it if it's difficult to understand, so we can ask questions about it”. However, some pupils choose not to pay attention or ask questions: “Usually the teacher explains it in the class, because not everyone has help at home, but usually I don't pay attention” (Emma). Mia pays attention, but still has problems, as she explains: “When the teacher assigns homework, he explains the tasks. And sometimes I understand it in class, but I don't note it down. And when I come home after swimming, I don't remember anymore the explanation of what we are supposed to do”.

4.3.2 Assessing Homework

This category includes both consequences of not having done homework and ways of assessing the quality of homework in the classroom. The teachers discussed at length their views on assessing homework; half of all the references in this category come from the two teachers.

The views of the primary teacher about the consequences of not doing homework is summed up in this sentence: “Many times I was threatening them that if they won't do their homework they will get a bad grade, but I think I haven't given a single one over the whole year”. He emphasized that usually there was no serious consequence of not having done homework, but that they had a system for dealing with homework not done: “There were two types of consequences: you can do it for the next day, or you do a bit more for the next day, or you get a black point, and then when they collected three, they would get a bad grade. But if someone once didn't have some homework, it didn't have any serious consequence”. He also said that if a pupil approached him before a class and explained the reason he did not do his homework, he would not suffer any consequences. The English teacher is also using the black point system: one homework not done is a black point, and five results in a bad grade.

About assessing homework that has been done, the English teacher points out that “I don't think any homework is bad, I never punish badly written homework”. She also explains the way she assesses:
I walk through the task. I spend 2-3 minutes just checking if they have something. That way I find those who hadn't done it at all. Then I either collect them, and correct a few of them at the beginning of the class, or listen to a few. If it's a written task, I always collect them and correct them, there's no other way. If they had to prepare something verbally, I give that task often, I don't care about their notes, I just listen to them.

(English teacher)

The children mentioned the black point system, but also added that from the subjects that they have only once a week they would get a bad grade for a missing homework. In the view of the pupils the consequences are clear; there is no room for explanations as the primary teacher said: “If we have only one lesson per week, we get a bad grade in the personal grade booklet. Otherwise we get a black point” Isabella explains. When it comes to assessment pupils take the teachers “threats” seriously. Grades are very important for them, and when they hear that they might get a bad grade for something, they take it very seriously, even though it might never happen.

The pupils mention examples of being tested based on the homework: “sometimes the teacher asks us questions, and if we don't know the answer, we get a little black point” (El- la); “the teacher sometimes gives tests from the assigned reading materials” (Olivia); “if he sees that few people have done it he can give a test from that, too, to see who has done it” (Zoe). There are also mentions of correcting their own or each other’s homework: “we can check it together, we can swap notebooks with the person sitting next to us, and we can mark what's correct and what's not. But the teacher doesn't allow that anymore, because there was this girl who didn't write anything and at the end she filled in the whole poem we had to learn, and marked it as correct” Zoe points out.

Kayla gives different examples of assessment: “the teacher reads them (essays), the ones he finds the best. There were times when he selected mine, and that was a really good feeling”; “we watched pictures about them (the famous people they made the projects about) and we told stories”. The primary teacher also recalls the moments of sharing the essays pupils wrote “they came and read it every class, and enjoyed it a lot”.

4.3.3 Classroom climate

This category contains general comments about the classroom climate, how children feel within the classroom, and attitudes toward the teacher. For this reason all references come from pupils. The primary teacher’s view on classroom climate is made evident by some phrases he uses in his interview often, for instance “we agreed together” or “we discussed”. These tell about a democratic classroom environment, where children are part of the decision making process. Some pupils confirm this by mentioning how they can ask questions about tasks, and Zoe gives an example of when they divided the homework tasks between themselves together in the classroom to cover a topic.

The teacher appears in the pupils’ narrative as somebody who has authority, who “notices if we lie” (Zoe), but is also reasonable as he does not check homework on the week before the English entrance exam and cares for the pupils: “(the teacher) doesn't give that (homework) because it makes him feel better to see us suffer, but because it help us prepare” (Emma). David thinks “he can get us to understand things” and that he “usually gives tasks that are more exciting” compared to a task given by a substitute.

Zoe brings up what seems to her as strict assessment: “if I ask for it (a dictionary), the teacher will ask me why I need it, and if it's a word that we already learnt and I should know it, then I'm in trouble”, a thought echoed by Melanie: “If we don't know a subtraction or an addition, or if we don't know a word in Romanian at home we can ask our parents. But if we don't know these things here, we either get a black dot, or a bad grade”. Zoe also admits that she is a “bit afraid of the teacher” and points out a moral lesson she learnt from him: “It's better if you get an honest good or satisfactory grade, than to get an excellent through cheating”.

In this section the classroom environment has been presented, focusing on those elements that are connected with homework: the general classroom climate, how homework is assigned and assessed. Assigning homework happens routinely, the same way since first grade, but children still report sometimes not writing down the tasks. The highest number of references was to homework assessment (36), both teachers and seven pupils talked about this topic in great detail, and there are meaningful differences in how they perceived it. There were two main aspects of assessment discussed: the consequences of homework not done, and assessing existing homework. The primary teacher explained that he does not really give bad grades for his pupils, but the pupils see the threat of bad grades as
reality. The assessment of existing homework often happens in form of feedback and peer assessment, but also through tests and quizzes, as reported by the pupils.

When it comes to classroom climate, the teacher refers to a democratic classroom environment, where decisions are made together with the pupils. However, many children seemed to be afraid of the teacher, while agreeing that he is reasonable and wants what is best for them.

4.4 Home Environment

The home environment is a category that emerged while coding, and it contains references to parental involvement, descriptions of atmosphere at home compared to school and descriptions of the daily routine children have. This category will be described briefly because it is not central to the scope of this thesis. The table below describes the number of references in this category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories in home environment</th>
<th>Number of coding references</th>
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<th>Number of pupils</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Parental involvement</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1 (primary teacher)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4.1 Parental involvement

The references coded under this category contain information about how parents are present during homework and what kind of help they provide. The fragments from the teachers coded under this category contain information about what they think the role of parents during homework.

Both teachers think that “supervision at home is important” (English teacher), and the primary teacher gives practical examples of how the parents can help:

*It depends on what grade the children are in. The younger the pupils are, the more important the parents' role is. We start in school, and they get some kind of picture about...*
how they should proceed. We often do similar tasks in school, in groups, but also individually. So they develop some skills. But a parent can tell them also to be careful with certain things. Parents are a bit like the little yellow office helper pin was in the old word: they say useful tips: If you would include something here, it would be more interesting. Or maybe you could write something more about this. I think children always need this kind of help. We adults have some experience they lack. We know things, we can say that "if you would put this here, it would look much better, and the others would notice it, and they will go wow." And if you add this, or color it, or use certain colors then it will be much more vibrant, and that matters a lot in a poster. (Primary teacher)

He also thinks that parents’ attitudes vary a lot, and this has an impact on the pupils’ attitude towards homework:

_There were always children like this (who regularly didn't do homework), and this attitude comes from the family as well. Some help the children, know what's happening in the school....But there is always someone who -shakes his head to signal no-, regardless of what's the tasks... In these families it's better if they have 40 math equations as homework. Because then they know that the child does it by himself sitting at his desk ...writing homework, and not causing any trouble. (Primary teacher)_

In most cases the pupils reported that someone is at home while they are doing homework, but they do not interfere unless the children ask them for help. For instance, pupils reported asking for help in assessing their knowledge before a test: “I show Mom what we learnt and what I have to know for the test, and then she puts together some questions for me” (Bella); “They help me learn the poem; they check the text while I try to recite it” (Ben); “Mom checks from my notebook and tells me if I'm showing it right or not (places on a map)”; “for the English test I asked mom to check if I'm saying the right things, and I was talking and she was checking” (Zoe). Pupils also reported asking for help with handling technology: “She downloaded a book from the computer” (Emma); “And mom downloaded pictures from the Internet, and we put that on a CD” (Emma); “glued some pictures that we printed with mom” (Mia).

Pupils have a different amount of control over how much their parents help. Mia’s mother takes part every day in the homework: “I always first write it on a separate paper, and then when mom comes home from work, she always corrects it” while Olivia has a different
approach: “I do my homework by myself. She always wants to look through it, but I don't let her do that”. Zoe’s mom is present through most of the homework, but Zoe said that: “I send her away when I start writing. She's telling me weird things. She's telling me <you should write this sentence>”. Ben explains that his family members are available to him if he needs help, but in a certain order: “First I try with grandma, then I go to mom and then to dad”.

Some children have more freedom than others “Mom never tells me when to do it. She just says that I should study when my mind is fresh” (David); “if my parents let me, I watch TV” (Bella); “I usually do it quickly, if I don't do it, mom kills me” (Zoe); “my mom always tells me that I should sit down first, and do my homework” (Isabella)

4.4.2 Atmosphere at home

This category contains answers to the question "How does learning at home differ from learning at school?" and general comments about how the environment at home is. The primary teacher reflected on the differences between learning at home and learning in school:

At home he's alone; the parent is helping, so he's getting a different kind of help. The environment is different... they have a bigger freedom. They have a task to do, but they can decide to go down to get a snack, or take a breath of fresh air. Compared to school, this is a huge freedom; there the schedule is very strict and fixed. ...At home, they go home, they have some rules, there too, I'm sure, but they can make much more decisions themselves. (Primary teacher)

In the pupils’ answers the theme of the parent help being different appears in both positive and negative ways. According to David the help offered by the teacher is more valuable than what he can get at home: “here in school we have the teacher, and he can get us to understand things. At home there's mom, but... well, she can help also, but it's not the same”. Mia shares a similar view to David, as she thinks that learning “at home is a bit more difficult, because we don't have the teacher to explain to us. And mom doesn't explain it the same way as him”. Kayla on the other hand thinks it is easier to ask for help at home: “we can ask for help here, too, but sometimes it's easier at home. Because at home you are only one, so of course it's different".
A reappearing theme is the peacefulness of the home compared to the distractions at school: “here at school there are always children who are loud and I cannot pay attention. I like learning more at home” (Ella); “at home it's easier just because if we have individual work in school, everyone is asking questions and being loud” (Kayla); “at home you can learn alone, in peace. Here in school you have your peers to talk to if you're bored” (Ben). For Kathie being alone makes learning difficult: “at home I'm alone, so it's more difficult. And here in school everyone is here”.

4.4.3 Routine

This category contains descriptions of children’s everyday activities from the time they leave school to the time they arrive home. The question referring to this was included at the start of the interviews to introduce the subject. From the references it can be seen that all pupils eat before starting homework, four pupils go to some kind of training after school on a regular basis, and four pupils take naps before starting their homework.

In this section the home environment has been presented. As homework is done in the context of home, it was relevant to discover important aspects of it: how much parents help, how children see parental help, how much the teacher expects parents to be present during homework time, and what is the general atmosphere like. Parental involvement is an essential aspect of the homework process, as all the participants mentioned it, and discussed it in detail, as suggested by the high number of references to the subject (48). The home environment is described as peaceful compared to school, but the different kind of help available appears as a source of difficulty for some.

4.5 Learning strategies and self-motivation beliefs

This category contains references to self-regulated learning processes (e.g. strategies used by pupils) and to self-motivation beliefs influencing self-regulated learning. The subcategories for this category are based on the reviewed model of Zimmerman by Panadero and Alonso-Tapia (Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2014). A table with the detailed description of the coding categories and subcategories can be found in Appendix 2. The references included in this section are the result of children recalling the way they solved particular tasks, and the habits they generally have while doing homework. The results are organized
according to the three main phases of self-regulation defined by Zimmerman (2001): forethought, performance and self-reflection.

There are a total number of 233 references in the learning strategies and self-motivation category, from which 217 come from pupils’ accounts (93% of total references). There is a prevalence of pupil sources as mostly they described their own beliefs and practices. The references from teachers come from descriptions of how they think the children approach certain tasks, or how they should proceed.

Figure 5. Distribution of references in the learning strategies and self-motivational beliefs category.

Figure 5 describes the distribution of all references across the three phases of self-regulation. References related to the forethought and performance phases were close in their number (108 references for the forethought phase and 104 references for the performance phase); however, references to the self-reflection phase were scarce in the data. In the interviews with the teachers there were more references to the performance phase than in the case of the pupils: 63% of all teacher references coded in the learning strategies category belonged to the performance phase subcategory, while only 43% of pupils’ references belonged to the same subcategory.

Table 7 shows the frequency of total references coded (both teachers’ and pupils’ references) in the learning strategies and self-motivational beliefs category and its subcategories.
Table 7. Frequency of references in learning strategies category and its subcategories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes under learning strategies</th>
<th>Number of coding references</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Number of pupils</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Forethought phase</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-motivation beliefs</td>
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<td>Goal orientation</td>
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<td>Task interest</td>
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<td>Outcome expectations</td>
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<td>Self-efficacy beliefs</td>
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4.5.1 Forethought phase

This category contains references to strategies used in the initial phase of learning as well as self-motivation beliefs that influence the strategies used in the following phases.
4.5.1.1  **Self-motivation beliefs**

Self-motivation beliefs are "Personal variables that generate and maintain the motivation to complete the task" (Panadero & Alonso-Tapia, 2014, p. 453). They have a very important role in the self-regulated cycle as they influence all phases’ processes: the goals pupils set, the strategies they choose and the way their commitment to complete the task.

4.5.1.1.1  Task interest and task value

There were 39 instances of pupils expressing liking to a subject in general or certain type of task in particular. These varied in the level of how general they were, and ranged from general comments about homework: “I don't really like to do homework” (Kayla); “I like writing homework” (Zoe) to certain type of tasks: “I like to draw” (Mia); “I really like essays” (Olivia). Some pupils mentioned subjects “I'm really looking forward to solving the homework from math” (Amelia); “I don’t like Romanian” (Ella). The most specific comments were from pupils who recalled specific tasks: “For example we had a homework task when we had to draw an imaginary city. That was so good! I enjoyed it.” (Zoe).

Task interest and difficulty level often appeared together: “I like the ones that are not too hard” (Isabella); “an essay…is a bit difficult for me, because I don't like to write” (Emma)

Task value was associated with the words “useful” (“when we have to make a poster, I think that is really useful”, Ben) and “meaningful” (“some of them are not meaningful at all. Sometimes we get these exercises that are all the same”, Ben).

Some task types were associated in greater number with task interest than others. Writing and task interest appeared together in 8 references, for example David explained why he likes essays “I liked it when we had to write essays, because I had many new ideas” and Bella gives an example of an essay she particularly enjoyed: “Once we had to write a recipe for a magic potion. I really enjoyed that”. Also crafts and projects appeared together with task interest in two references each. The primary teacher explains about projects that “if it's something more interesting than 5*3, then it's different. It's not boring, you go and search in books, ask your parents. These kinds of tasks are meaningful”.

4.5.1.1.2  Goal orientation

The goal orientation of pupils (their learning purposes) also showed in certain comments. References from eleven pupils can be included in this category, and from these references nine contain the words grade (“I do the homework not to get a bad grade. If I don't do it, it
has consequences” Mia), black point (“I do the homework because I don't want to get a black point or a bad grade”, Ella) or test (“I have to learn it because we might get a surprise test”, Isabella). These associations point to performance avoidance orientation. However, there are also some references to mastery orientation: “I worked until 11 pm on the homework… It was almost done, but I wanted to develop it a bit more” (Olivia); “If we wouldn’t get homework I would read things that seem interesting” (Kathie). Kathie’s comment is in contrast with Emma, who admitted that “It's more difficult to convince myself now (to do homework) that I know that I won't get a bad grade”.

4.5.1.1.3 Self-efficacy beliefs
When expressing self-efficacy beliefs pupils most often mention their belief of being able to cope with the homework in fifth grade: “I think if I will be paying attention at school then I will be able to do them” (Ben). Olivia explains that sometimes homework “takes so long! But after a while I usually succeed”. Ella gives an example of a strategy to improve her self-efficacy beliefs: “I start with the more difficult ones, because I have the feeling that if I can do that then everything will be easier”. According to the English teacher, gradually increasing the difficulty level can help pupils have higher self-efficacy beliefs: “if I ask them to start with a very difficult topic, it doesn't work. But if they start with what they like and know, they are like, ok, I managed to do these, there are only three more left”.

4.5.1.2 Task Analysis
During task analysis, the pupil sets goals and chooses the strategies he will use in the following phases.

4.5.1.2.1 Goal setting
The references that can be included under goal setting by performance level can be divided in two categories: cases when pupils decide not to do their homework due to tiredness or do it superficially and cases when pupils want to achieve a level higher than expected by the teacher. The primary teacher summed up this situation in his interview: “there are always some that take it very seriously and some that just do it to have it done”.

Two pupils give examples of what happens when they are tired: “I end up not doing it. I tell myself that ok, today no homework, but it will get done some other day” (Bella); “At those times I eat, watch TV and write my homework at the same time. And then somehow it gets done… Yes, it takes a bit longer, but it feels less painful. Usually I don't have the TV on when I do homework, just when I really don't feel like concentrating on the tasks”
Kathie just wants to get it over with when she’s tired: “At those times I sit down and I try to write it as quickly as possible, so I'm over it fast”.

Olivia on the other hand gives examples of setting goals based on a high level of achievement she wants to achieve: “sometimes I write extra, more than we were supposed to, two whole sheets of paper on both sides”; “I think I didn't have enough text on it. I counted that I had only four sentences, and I thought four sentences was not enough”. It can be seen that she is aware of the assessment criteria (“more than we were supposed to”) but she still chooses to achieve more.

There are also examples of goal setting based on assessment criteria. David explains that “the teacher always tells us what kind of tasks to expect on the test. And then I take out my notebook for example, and I start looking through it, so I remember what we learnt”.

4.5.1.2.2 Strategic planning

Based on the goals they set pupils choose their strategies and plan their work. They are examples of strategic planning in the data. Most of them describe a conscious decision to organize the order in which they do the tasks: “I check what we had to do. If we have a poem to learn, then I leave that last. And I do first all the written tasks, and then I learn the poem” (Ben).

The pupils also give examples of strategic planning when they talk about studying for a test: “First I do my homework; the most important thing is to have that for the next day. Then I practice until I need to, and I learn the things that way” (Olivia). Ben assesses his knowledge and chooses strategies based on that: “it depends whether I know the material for the test or not. If it's very difficult then I regularly read through the material, and I set aside some time to do this. If it's just a quick test I just do my homework and read once through my notebook and that's all” (Ben). David planned the way he prepared for the English entrance exam: “I took it out every day, and read it, so it would be fresh. And I started a month ago learning the texts, I learnt one every day, so I wouldn't mix them up. The written part I practiced every day”

4.5.2 Performance phase

During performance phase pupils need to monitor and control their cognition and motivation. There are mostly traces of the self-control process in the data; there are few references
to self-observation or monitoring. For example, there is evidence of engaging in self-observation in Olivia’s interview, when she says: “Sometimes I just read so quickly, that I don't understand, but then I start over”. It can be seen that she monitored her understanding of the text, and when she noticed that she did not understand, she reacted to it. Melanie gives another example of metacognitive monitoring: “If there's something that I know that is not going so well, then I read it through once or twice more”.

4.5.2.1 Task strategies

Instances of self-control appear frequently within the data. The most common are specific strategies associated with tasks, especially projects and writing essays.

The primary teacher gave examples of the task strategies he noticed the pupils use: “in these (project-like tasks) they have to research, to search for information…I think in this class there were much fewer pupils who actually just copied something from somewhere compared to my previous class. They don't just write it quickly, they start selecting, look up several sources”.

Strategies related to working on projects mentioned by the pupils include searching for information, selecting relevant information, and creating a visualization of it in form of a poster or presentation: “(I wrote) about Traianus, and I found out more about him, than just from school… I did it on the computer. First, I looked up good information about him, his father… then I looked for pictures. I included a coin which had his picture on it” (Isabella); “I asked dad where I could find material about him. He said that I should look in the Big Encyclopedia, I found 3 pages! (Did you read all that?) Yes and the most important things I wrote down” (Kathie); “I downloaded from the internet, from Wikipedia, interesting facts. I wrote those on a paper and then I took a big paper and I draw on it, or glued some pictures on it that we printed with mom” (Mia).

The primary teacher explained how he thinks pupils should proceed with math exercises: “From math if they have a certain type of exercise, they should just browse through how we solved the ones we did in class, and based on that they can solve it. If they do that, they can solve it”. The English teacher is also of the opinion that to be successful with homework pupils need to “really sit down at home and read through what we did in school”.

Kayla explained how she proceeds with essays: “I sit down, think about what I want to write about, and then sometimes I write a draft, but most times I just write in my copy-
book”. Melanie uses similar strategies when she is writing an essay: “I think a bit, and if I come up with something I write down the key words. And then, when I have all the key-words, even if they are just in my head, then I can already phrase a sentence”.

4.5.2.2 Help-seeking strategies

Pupils also use help-seeking strategies when they are doing homework. From the 16 references included in this category 14 are directed towards family members (“When I don't understand something I always ask mom”, Isabella), one towards the teacher (“if we get an essay, then I ask in school questions about it”, Kayla) and one to friends (“On these occasions I usually call my friend, and ask her if she knows”, Mia).

4.5.2.3 Time management and environmental structuring

Pupils have given examples also of using time management and environmental structuring strategies. Examples of time management are: “sometimes we get more, and then we can schedule our times. For example 10 minutes we do math, 10 minutes we read, and so on” (Melanie); “From geography I don't do the homework the day we get it, because there's another week until the next lesson, I have one, two, three.., six days to do it” (Olivia); “I know that at 6 I have to start in order to finish it before 9, if we have a lot” Bella. Organizing the environment consists for example of switching of the television or organizing the work space: “I go in my room, organize my desk. I do that because in the evening I always leave a mess” (Olivia), but also limiting the presence of parents: “I send mom away when I start writing” (Zoe).

4.5.2.4 Motivational control

Pupils also provide examples of sustaining their motivation while studying using various strategies. Melanie describes how she motivates herself while writing an essay: “I always have to get inspiration, and I get inspiration for example from eating a piece of chocolate”. Kathie rewards herself when she is done with homework with going out to ride her bike (self-consequence). Olivia calls a friend when she does not feel like doing homework, and that cheers her up, while Isabella starts drawing for a while if she needs a break. Amelia is the only one who gives an example of a self-given message: “I usually tell myself that I need to sit down and do it”.

4.5.3 Self-reflection phase

Pupils assess their work during self-reflection phase and attribute reasons for their success or failure. There are 17 references to self-judgment within the data. Sentences such as “I think it turned out quite nice” or “It went well” (Mia) express evaluations of their performance, while Amelia, for example, reflected on the outcome of a certain task “I learnt how to write a story very concisely”. Children expressed happiness and pride about their results: “the teacher reads them (essays), the ones he finds the best. There were times when he selected mine, and that was a really good feeling” (Kayla); “My poster is this big (she shows, extending her arms), and both sides are covered” (Olivia).

Some pupils also make causal attributions. Olivia makes adaptive attributions by attributing her success to hard work: “When I studied and put my mind to it, I got a very good. If I studied just a bit, I got a good” or “on the test for fractions I got a "very good" because I practiced a lot”. Zoe attributes her difficulties to external factors: “From math I'm getting only "good" these days on tests. Although I pay attention in class, the tasks in the book are phrased differently than the ones we do in class”.

In this section the self-regulated learning processes and self-motivational beliefs present in the data have been presented. The categories task interest and task strategies had most references, while goal setting and more complex metacognitive strategies like imagery were seldom mentioned by pupils. The task strategies mentioned by the teachers as desirable or expected matched the strategies pupils used, this was apparent especially in the case of project-type tasks. Self-control processes were significantly more frequent in the data than instances of self-observation. The references were distributed unequally between the different phases: forethought and performance phase had similar number of references, while students mentioned processes related to the self-reflection phase only a few times. Teachers had very few references coded under learning strategies and self-motivation beliefs.

4.6 Summary of results

In the results section the data was presented according to the five main coding categories: homework beliefs, homework assignment, classroom environment, home environment and learning strategies. The main findings are presented below.
• Homework beliefs
  o Most recognized purpose of homework by both teachers and pupils is personal development, which includes among others: developing personal responsibility, time management and self-assessment skills.
  o Strengthening parent-child relations as the purpose of homework was recognized only by the teachers, while learning new things was seen as the purpose of homework only by pupils.
  o Preparation for the future and challenge as purposes of homework unique to the data, do not appear in Epstein et al. (2001)
  o Preparation for future associated with homework quantity.

• Homework tasks
  o Writing tasks were the most talked about, followed by exercises and projects.
  o Difficulty level neither too difficult nor too easy as reported by teacher, confirmed by children.
  o Quantity: According to children, it is acceptable now, they are afraid of next year; teachers want to give small amount, and sometimes they have to give more, to prepare pupils for the fifth grade.

• Classroom and home environment
  o Children think the consequences of not doing homework are severe, teacher thinks he is lenient.
  o Assessment of completed homework: written or oral feedback, peer assessment, pupils’ attitude positive towards it.
  o Classroom climate is democratic according to the teacher, however children report being afraid of the teacher or bad grades, but they also think the teacher is reasonable.
o The atmosphere at home is mostly described as peaceful compared to home, but for some learning is more difficult because of the lack of support from teacher.

o Parents are generally seen as a resource, help-seeking behavior is mostly directed at them.

- Learning strategies and personal beliefs

  o Predominance of pupils’ accounts, few references from teachers.

  o Both teachers and pupils mention self-reflection only seldom; highest percentage of pupil references associated with forethought phase, highest percentage of teacher references with performance phase.

  o There are many references to motivational aspects, especially to task interest and task value. Task value is associated with meaningful tasks, task interest with certain task types (writing, crafts, and projects).

  o Most pupils gave examples of strategic planning – organizing tasks, choosing learning strategies based on self-evaluation.

  o Pupils described using more task strategies when talking about projects, writing tasks or studying for the English exam.

  o Goal orientation often performance avoidance, most references contain the words: grade, test, black point.

  o Pupils evaluate their own work and express self-satisfaction.
5 Discussion

This thesis set out to examine the factors influencing pupils’ self-regulation while doing homework through considering teachers’ homework related practices and beliefs and how children perceive these. The factors that affect the way children do homework are various: (a) the type of task assigned; (b) the quantity and quality of the tasks; (c) what the teachers’ beliefs about the purpose of homework are, and (d) what children perceive as the purpose of homework. In the results section these elements were presented as they appear in the data collected, as well as the self-regulated strategies the pupils reported using while doing homework. In this section, the main results described in section 4 will be presented to illustrate how they answer the research questions. At the end of the section, an overview of the self-regulatory processes reported is provided.

5.1 How do teachers and pupils conceptualize homework?

In this section the students’ and teachers’ beliefs about the purpose, importance and meaning of homework will be discussed, focusing on what are their common and different beliefs. The beliefs’ relation to promoting or developing self-regulation is also discussed shortly.

Both the primary teacher and the English teacher agree that the main purpose of homework is personal development, and nine of the 13 pupils mentioned this as the main aspect of homework. As defined by Epstein and Voorhis (Epstein & Voorhis, 2001, p. 182), the purpose “personal development” is defined as "to build pupil responsibility, honesty, perseverance, time management, self-confidence". In the data, the element of self-assessment as the purpose of homework was also included under this category.

Warton (1997) found that pupils often do not feel responsible for their homework, however assigning personal development as the main purpose of homework points to the fact that students recognize that homework is their own responsibility, and they receive homework so they could practice having a responsibility and deadlines, and learn to “how to study properly” on their own, too (from interview with Ben). Students’ perceived responsibility in homework has been linked to their academic achievement (Kitsantas & Zimmerman, 2008).
Knowing that homework is their own responsibility and that they are required to do it to improve their learning skills provides the right setting for pupils to self-regulate their learning: according to Coutts (2004), pupils need to feel responsible for their homework in order for it to foster the development of self-regulation skills. The examples the pupils provide for strategic planning show that they feel responsible and take initiative in organizing their work place, their tasks and the strategies they use for solving it. As seen on figure 5, the purpose of personal development was related to strategic planning and time management, as students reported that they have to plan their work in order to be ready on time.

![Diagram of homework purposes and self-regulatory processes](image)

*Figure 6. Purposes of homework recognized by both pupils and teachers and the self-regulatory processes and beliefs associated with them.*

Figure 6 shows the relations between homework purposes that were common amongst students and at least the primary teacher and the different self-regulatory processes and beliefs that were associated with them. The purpose “prepare for the future” appeared together with references to bigger quantity, as students recognized that they get a bigger amount of homework now so they would be prepared for the fifth grade. The increased quantity was related to negative affect, such as anxiety, and a reduced task interest.

The purposes of practice and challenge were both linked to the exercise type tasks, but in different ways. When exercises were mentioned having the purpose of practice (like repeating the same type of tasks), they did not spark students’ interest.

When exercises were described as challenging, then students reported high self-efficacy beliefs, and the primary teacher pointed out the tasks strategies he expects children to use when solving challenging tasks. The primary teacher and three pupils mention the purpose
of homework to be to challenge the pupils, to make them think. This purpose is not listed by Epstein et al. (2001). Examples of challenging tasks are mathematic exercises that require logic.

The purpose of homework being that of “learning something new” was only mentioned by pupils, the primary teacher explicitly said that he never gives homework with this purpose. The discrepancy between pupils’ and teachers’ beliefs in this case might be due to the pupils being aware of their learning outcomes: even if the purpose of homework was not to have children learn something new, learning happens in all situations.

There is a similarity between teacher and children beliefs in the data, especially when it comes to the primary teacher and the pupils. In the studies described in the theoretical section relating to pupil’s views on homework, there was generally a gap between how the adults and children conceptualized homework (e.g. Xu & Yuan, 2003). Coutts (2004) recommended that clear communication between pupils and teachers could help bridge this gap and help students recognize the benefits of homework. It can just be assumed that the shared beliefs noted in this study are a result of an open communication about the benefits of homework.

5.2 How do teachers’ task choices influence pupils’ self-regulatory processes?

In this section the focus is on the homework assignment - the task types, their difficulty level and quantity- and their relation to students’ self-regulatory processes and beliefs. There were five main types of tasks mentioned in the data: writing tasks, reading tasks, projects, crafts and others.

From amongst the task types, writing tasks were the most often mentioned. Writing tasks in the data refer to essays, described by the primary teacher as “creative tasks, small essays to write”. The topics for these essays were diverse, and students could recall many of them, even from years earlier. This shows that these tasks were meaningful for the students, and meaningful assignments are one of the key conditions for supporting self-regulated learning (Bembenutty, 2011a).

Creative writing tasks and projects were the two types of assignments associated with the most self-regulatory processes and beliefs. They were both related to task interest and help-seeking; and while solving the creative writing tasks students reported using motivational
control strategies, and making projects was associated with higher use of task strategies. Pintrich and Schunk (2002) found that task interest was associated with student engagement, which in turn leads to a higher use of strategies, as is the case in our data, as both creative writing and projects were linked with high task interest.

Figure 7 shows the different task types mentioned in the data and the self-regulatory processes and beliefs associated with them. The type of task “exercise” on this figure refers only to challenging exercises, as exercises with the purpose of practice were not associated with any self-regulatory processes other than being associated with a decreased task interest. Although the primary teacher thinks that repetitive exercises are meaningless, and he tries to give some tasks “more interesting than 5*3”, pupils mention that some tasks they receive as homework are repetitive. According to Paris et al. (2001), pupils are more likely to engage in repetitive tasks superficially, which explains the lack of task strategies related to exercises assigned for practicing.

Figure 7. Task types and the self-regulatory processes and beliefs associated with them.

Challenging exercises are mentioned when talking about task difficulty and self-efficacy beliefs: “Some of them are really easy, and some are a bit more difficult to solve. But we can solve them” (Amelia). When not speaking about challenging tasks, a high difficulty level is negatively related to task interest, students often expressed that they do not like what is difficult, or they like something because it is easy. The reason for challenging tasks not decreasing task interest even though they are difficult might be that those students who recognized the challenge aspect of these tasks were able to solve them successfully. For the
rest, they were just difficult. Having some tasks that are challenging and some that are easi-
er avoids boredom – according to the study of Bempechat et al. (2011) higher achieving
pupils were bored of easy tasks and lower achieving pupils of difficult tasks.

According to Corno (1996, p. 28), an expert teacher adjusts the amount, content and type
of assignments to his pupils’ “capabilities and needs” at the moment. The students were
satisfied with the amount of homework they usually got, and the difficulty level seemed to
be varied as well, which suggests that it was adjusted to the goals the teacher wanted to
achieve.

Projects and creative writing tasks can be included under open-ended tasks, which foster
more complex approaches for solving them (Turner, 1995). Worksheets are sorted by
Turner (1995) in the closed task category, however the way some pupils talk about chal-
 lenging exercises shows that a well-chosen closed-task can also foster self-regulated learn-
ing skills as they require motivation and emotion regulation and trying different strategies.
Although closed-tasks are not usually associated with strategy use, challenging tasks have
been found to stimulate pupil engagement (Cooper, Horn, & Strahan, 2005), which might
explain why the primary teacher and children conceived challenging closed tasks as fost-
ering similar approaches as open tasks.

The types of tasks mentioned in the data mostly follow the guidelines listed in section 2.3,
as they are meaningful, authentic, spark task interest, and encourage responsibility and
engagement. The only task type that does not fit this description are the repetitive exercises
that have the purpose of practicing.

5.3 What are the elements of the classroom environment that affect homework and
how do pupils relate to it?

The nature of the environment and the specific situation define what kind of self-regulatory
strategies the learner will engage in (Schunk, 2001). In the case of homework, the envi-
ronment is shared between classroom and home. In this section the elements of the class-
room environment affecting homework will be discussed.

The classroom environment is described by the primary teacher as a democratic one, where
pupils participate in the decision making process. Pupils also recall examples of situations
that support this, and they are aware of the teacher’s good intentions. From the primary
teacher interview, the description of democratic leader emerges (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002), who encourages pupils to share ideas, make decisions and has fair and consistent rules. Students confirm this image by citing the same rules for consequences of homework not done, and by being aware that they can ask questions. For example when homework is assigned students are encouraged to ask questions and they can decide for themselves when, how and if they write down the requirements for the tasks assigned.

The classroom appears to have a constructivist classroom design, where pupils are active participants in their learning process and the teacher uses meaningful and authentic tasks, as discussed in the previous section. Democratic leadership and a constructivist classroom design provide a suitable environment for promoting self-regulation (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).

However, some methods of assessment and the reactions they evoke in the pupils do not fit the description of a constructivist classroom design. The primary teacher made the consequences of not doing homework clear to the children, as most of them recalled receiving a bad grade after a certain number of uncompleted homework tasks. The children expressed their fears about getting a bad grade, although the teacher said he has never given one, and that he encourages children to explain why they did not do their homework and gives them second chances to complete it. This fear of bad grades extends also to the classroom, where a number of pupils expressed that they feel scared of revealing that they do not know something, in case they would get a bad grade for it. This fear is in contrast with the emotions expressed in relation to the home environment, where it is peaceful and acceptable to make mistakes.

As seen on figure 8, the consequences of not doing homework are associated with goal orientation: fear of receiving a bad grade appears also in the data coded under goal orientation. Most pupils’ goal orientation can be categorized under performance avoidance goal orientation, which – according to Pintrich (2000) – is negatively related to pupils’ use of cognitive strategies. This is in contrast with the main recognized purpose of homework, personal development and the various strategies the same pupils reported using.
Opposed to the consequences of not having homework, assessing completed homework is associated with feelings of pride and happiness for being able to share their work with others in case of essays or projects, and it happens in form of oral or written feedback or peer assessment. According to Perry et al. (2004, p. 1856), teachers in high self-regulated learning classrooms use “nonthreatening evaluation practices that encourage pupils to focus on personal progress”.

A possible explanation for this dichotomy between general classroom environment and the seemingly strict consequences of homework (and the negative motivational beliefs associated with it) could be the societal pressure pupils face to get good grades. At the end of fourth grade pupils have to pass an entrance exam, and often the grades received in primary school are taken into account. The external pressure can also be seen in the case of the primary teacher, who, although he thinks “less is more” in case of homework gives more tasks in fourth grade just to prepare the pupils for the increased amount of homework they will receive in the fifth grade. This pressure is recognized by the pupils (“he gives us homework, sometimes also because he has to” Kayla; “doesn't give that (homework) because it makes him feel better to see us suffer, but because it help us prepare”, Emma).
5.4 **Overview of reported self-regulatory strategies**

In the previous three sections, the effects of beliefs, task choices and environment on pupils’ self-regulatory processes have been discussed. In this section, the self-regulatory processes that pupils report engaging in will be discussed in contrast with the strategies teachers assume their pupils use while doing homework.

As previously presented, teachers support the development of pupils’ self-regulated learning skills through certain task choices and beliefs, however, the results show that they are not aware of the strategies pupils could use while doing homework. Only 16 references coded under learning strategies and self-motivational beliefs come from teachers, most of which are associated with performance phase, and describe specific task strategies they expect their pupils to use. Forethought phase references from teachers are related to task interest and self-efficacy beliefs, and there are no teacher references related to self-reflection phase.

Pupils mention several different strategies they use while doing different homework tasks than the teachers are aware of, for instance environmental structuring, help seeking, time management, interest incentives and self-consequence. Pupils refer to forethought and performance phase processes and beliefs almost equally, but there are very few references related to self-reflection phase. As in case of teachers, in pupils’ reports references to task interest and specific task strategies are the most frequent.

There are three striking issues arising from these results: (1) the teachers did not report self-regulated learning strategies in relation to homework, (2) prevalence of pupil references and (3) the unequal distribution of references amongst phases. Firstly, the lack of teacher references might be due to teachers not being aware of all the strategies pupils use or could use during homework. If this is the case, it also means that teachers are not consciously training the pupils to use self-regulatory strategies. However, pupils do report using strategies, and provide evidence of monitoring and controlling their cognition, motivation and environment. This can be the outcome of pupils learning the use of these strategies through modeling from their teachers and parents, which they have the chance to practice during well-chosen homework tasks, for which they assume responsibility. This hypothesis is supported by the lack of use of higher-order strategies, like goal setting or self-assessment, which would require specific and conscious training to acquire.
Thirdly, unequal distribution of references (i.e. scarce number of pupil references and no teacher references related to the self-reflection phase) could be attributed to the assessment methods used in the classroom, where self-assessment is not present. One aspect that could explain why neither the teachers nor the pupils speak about self-reflection is the way homework is assessed in the classroom: homework is usually assessed by the teacher, on rare occasions by peers, and never by the pupil himself.

Pupils report using a number of strategies while doing homework (217 references), even though teachers do not seem to be aware of the opportunities for the use of learning strategies homework offers. According to Zimmerman (2002, p. 70), self-regulated pupils are characterized by their “personal initiative, perseverance, and adoptive skill”. Despite the lack of awareness of teachers of self-regulated learning strategies, the pupils in this study have shown evidence of perseverance and taking initiative as well as the adapting their strategies based on the type of task they face during homework. It seems that teachers promote self-regulated learning without specifically intending to, through helping their pupils assume responsibility for homework and offering tasks that are linked to an increased interest and keep the pupils engaged, which leads to higher strategy use (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002).
6 Conclusions

Pupils’ and teachers’ views on homework seem to be very much aligned, they recognize
the same main purposes, and the homework pupils would choose for themselves in most
cases was the same as the teacher would give. Responsibility, honesty, hard work and crea-
tivity are values that pupils share with the teachers, and pupils know that these attributes
will be appreciated in the classroom.

The fourth graders interviewed use a variety of self-regulated learning strategies including
strategic planning, metacognitive task strategies, help seeking, time and environment-
management, self-reflection and to a small extent motivation regulation and metacognitive
monitoring. The development of these skills is supported by the various, meaningful and
interesting tasks that pupils receive as well as recognizing personal development and chal-
lenge as the purpose of homework. Goal setting is an important aspect of self-regulated
learning and it is remarkably not present in the pupils’ accounts. This might be attributed to
the lack of explicit training in goal setting.

The factors influencing homework that have been discussed in this thesis (homework be-
liefs, homework assignment, and classroom environment) generally all facilitate the devel-
opment of self-regulated learning skills. However, there are some aspects external to the
classroom environment that leave traces within the classroom and home environment: fo-
cus on grades and the reputation of the fifth grade as having higher expectations. These
external factors cause the teacher to give more homework, despite his personal beliefs, and
these external factors might be behind pupils’ fear of getting bad grades.

This thesis set out to explore the ways in which teachers support pupils’ self-regulation
through homework. The findings suggest that teachers’ beliefs are recognized, and in some
cases adopted by their pupils. Homework being seen as having the purpose of supporting
personal development and challenging students supports self-regulation, while seeing
homework as an opportunity for preparing pupils for the fifth grade is associated with prac-
tices that are not beneficial for fostering self-regulatory development. Diverse tasks like
projects, creative writing tasks and mathematic exercises that require logic and thinking
were associated with a higher use of self-regulated learning strategies and higher task lik-
ing and task value as well as self-satisfaction. The varied difficulty level of tasks also helps
pupils develop their self-efficacy beliefs. This is also supported by certain forms of assessment like oral feedback or peer review in case of writing tasks and projects.

The empirical study presented in this thesis is an addition to both research on homework and self-regulated learning theory. Studying homework needs to happen embedded in the classroom and home environment and not just through studying the task itself, as other elements than the task (teacher beliefs, classroom environment) can influence the way pupils approach homework and the type and amount of self-regulated learning strategies they use.

6.1 Limitations and future lines of research

There are certain limitations to this research. First, the sample size is small, and the participating children came from an urban school, having very similar socio-economic backgrounds. It has been shown that children from low-income families are more at risk at developing maladaptive homework behaviors (Bempechat et al., 2011), so the results cannot be generalized. The “context in which a process occurs is critical to that process” (Bazeley, 2013, p. 334), and in this case the context is very narrow and specific. Second, there is a lack of parents’ perspective in the study.

Future lines of research could include a complex study including also parents’ views in the study and classroom and home observations in order to gain a full picture of the complex world of homework. In addition, more research is needed on teachers’ knowledge of self-regulated learning, and how this knowledge influences their classroom practices and how it relates to their beliefs. Longitudinal studies would contribute to this study’s findings as well, which would allow discovering how students with same early academic experiences develop their self-regulation skills when exposed to different academic models. Another interesting aspect to pursue would be to repeat the experiment with another class in the same school that had the another teacher for four years, to see what elements affecting homework are influenced by the teacher’s personal beliefs and what arise from the specific socio-cultural background of the school or school policies.
6.2 Practical implications

The results of this study show that teachers can influence their students’ self-regulatory development through homework in various ways. In the following, a few guidelines for educators will be presented based on this study.

The beliefs students have about the purpose and value of homework are influenced strongly by their teachers’ values. For this reason, educators should make clear the purpose for which they give homework. Emphasizing the personal responsibility students have over homework, and the benefits they can gain from doing homework (“learn how to learn” on their own) from an early age can help students approach homework assuming more responsibility and using more strategies. In addition, sharing with the students that the purpose of a homework task is challenge is beneficial for some students. Giving homework with the purpose of preparing for future difficulties or tests should be avoided, as it is not associated with beneficial strategy use, only an increased quantity.

There are several guidelines already existing for task choices for homework presented in section 2.3. The empirical study confirmed the benefits of these task choices. Based on this study, it can be recommended that educators use creative writing tasks and project like tasks more often, as these were associated with the most adaptive self-motivation beliefs and the highest use of strategies. Challenging tasks from mathematics are also good for promoting self-regulation. In general, including children in task setting, and choosing varying types of tasks and level of difficulty is the best approach to suit the different needs and personalities of students.

When it comes to classroom environment, teachers should be aware of the effect the ways of assessing homework has on how children do homework. Giving bad grades (or even threatening with them) or black points for not completing homework focuses students’ efforts on avoiding this, not on mastering the task. An alternative approach would be to give students the option to notify the teacher if they did not manage to do the homework and the reasons for it at the beginning of the day, and allow them extra time to complete it. Sharing their works done at home with their peers and the teacher made students feel proud and put extra effort in completing the works that were assessed in these ways. For this reason, it could be suggested that teachers offer opportunities for feedback and peer-assessment in their classrooms. Tests based on homework should be avoided, as they might discourage asking questions in the classroom for the fear of appearing unprepared.
Homework should integrate in the classroom environment seamlessly, if the classroom design is constructive and the activities engaging, then the homework should be and can be as well. Homework can be a valuable tool for students to practice alone and develop learning habits that they will use later. However, for this to occur, educators and parents have to work together to set the stage by providing suitable tasks, having a classroom environment that is supportive, allows mistakes to be made and is not grade centered and a home environment where the parent is there to help if needed, but does not take over the responsibility from the pupil.
7 Evaluation

This thesis attempted to explore the ways in which teachers’ can affect pupils’ self-regulation while doing homework. The results were presented and discussed in the previous sections. In this section the validity and reliability of the research will be evaluated first, after which the ethical concerns are discussed.

7.1 Validity, reliability

Yin (1994) names four widely used tests that can be used to measure the quality of empirical social research: construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. According to Yin (1994), internal validity is not a concert for exploratory case studies, which is the case of this study.

Having construct validity means that the researcher is using the appropriate measures for the concepts being studied (Yin, 1994). In the case of the empirical research presented in this thesis, this was achieved by using multiple sources of evidence (interviews from pupils and teachers, background information about teachers and pupils) and establish a chain of evidence, documenting each step of the process.

External validity refers to degree to which a study’s findings are generalizable (Yin, 1994). As this is single case study, the results cannot be generalized to a larger population. However, as the context of the study was described carefully, the results might be transferable to a similar context.

According to Yin (1994), a study is reliable if another researcher could replicate the results by following the same procedure described in the study and conducting the same case study. Reliability was enhanced by providing a clear description of the procedures in the “Methods” section and definition of coding categories used in the results. To measure the reliability of the coding scheme, parts of the data (a segment from a teacher and a pupil interview) were coded by an independent coder. The coding was then compared with the coding done by the author using Nvivo, and inter-rater agreement was found to be significant (Cohen’s Kappa 0,83).
7.2 Ethical concerns

Ethical concerns were considered in each phase of this study, following Christians’ (2000) principles of ethics for directing science. Before data collection, consent forms were given to the parents of all children in the fourth grade class that participated in the study. The consent forms contained detailed descriptions of the research process, its purpose, timetable, and use of the data. Thirteen children returned the signed consent forms before data collection. The children were themselves asked if they wished to participate in the study, and all thirteen agreed. No rewards were offered for participating, so participation was fully voluntary. The teachers were also explained the topic of the research and the research methods to be used, and they also gave their consents. There was no deception used during the research, the main aim of the research (what affects how children do homework) was known to all participants.

To ensure privacy and confidentiality, pseudonyms were used throughout the research process, and the list connecting the real names with the pseudonyms is kept in a separate folder from the research materials. All materials used in this research were authentic, and all data collected was used in the analysis, there were no omissions. Fidelity to the data and the use of authentic materials ensured accuracy of this work (Christians, 2000).
8 References


## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Coding categories and their definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories in Homework beliefs</th>
<th>Purpose of homework and its downsides – based on Epstein and Voorhis (2001)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal development</td>
<td>“To build student responsibility, honesty, perseverance, time management, self-confidence”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>“to increase speed, mastery or maintenance of skills”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation for the future</td>
<td>to prepare children for the bigger amount and higher difficulty level of homework in the higher grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn new things</td>
<td>Perceived purpose of homework is to discover new information, learn new skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>To introduce the next lesson, start student’s thinking; “Homework also maybe designed to stimulate students’ thinking about a topic”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenge</td>
<td>The purpose of homework is to ”make students think”, to challenge them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-child relations</td>
<td>“to establish communication between parent and child on the importance of schoolwork and learning” and involve home in general in the learning process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Comments on the negative side of homework</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories in homework assignments</th>
<th>Describes specific homework tasks, includes descriptions of tasks, their quantity and difficulty level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homework tasks</td>
<td>Descriptions of particular tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Writing a short essay for example.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercises</td>
<td>Includes tasks from the textbooks, work sheets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects</td>
<td>Complex tasks including information seeking, filtering found information and presenting the results in form of a poster of presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Tasks involving reading a fragment and understanding it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crafts</td>
<td>Tasks including drawing or doing some other handicrafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Comments on the difficulty level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework Difficulty</td>
<td>Comments on the quantity of homework received.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categories within classroom environment</td>
<td>Classroom climate, classroom activities related to homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assigning homework</td>
<td>How teacher assigns homework in the classroom (explanations, notes children take, questions they ask, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing homework</td>
<td>Includes both consequences of not having done homework and ways of assessing the quality of homework in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom climate</td>
<td>General classroom climate, how children feel within the classroom, attitudes toward the teacher.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories in home environment</th>
<th>Parental involvement, description of home environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parental involvement</td>
<td>How parents are present during homework, what kind of help they provide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmosphere</td>
<td>Answers to the question &quot;How does learning at home differ from learning at school?&quot; and general comments about how they feel while studying at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>What children do between the time they leave school until the evening.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 2 – Codes under learning strategies and their definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes under learning strategies based on Panadero and Alonso-Tapia (2014)</th>
<th>Processes of SRL (e.g. strategies used), beliefs influencing SRL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Forethought phase**  
Strategies used in the forethought phase as well as self-motivation beliefs that influence the strategies used in the following phases | |
|  
**Self-motivation beliefs**  
"Personal variables that generate and maintain the motivation to complete the task" |  
Goal orientation: students’ beliefs about their learning purposes  
Task interest: liking the task  
Outcome expectations: "Beliefs about the probability for success"  
Self-efficacy beliefs: "Students’ belief about their capability to perform the task"  
Task value: "Relevance of the task for the personal goals" |
|  
Task analysis  
"The student fragments the task and establishes strategies" |  
Assessment criteria: To select the goals the student take into account the standards against which their performance will be assessed  
Performance level: To select the goals the student take into account the level of perfection they want to achieve |
|  
Strategic planning | "Selecting an action plan and choosing the strategies" |
| **Performance phase**  
Evidence of strategies used for monitoring and controlling motivation and cognition. | |
|  
**Self-control**  
"Process of maintaining the concentration and interest through strategies" |  
Metacognitive  
Environmental structuring: Modifying the environment to facilitate learning  
Help-seeking: Asking for help when needed  
Imagery: Using "mental images that organize the information and help focus their attention"  
Task strategies: "Use of specific tactics related to the task"  
Time management: Planning the time |
|  
Motivational  
Interest incentives: Self-directed messages that remind of the goal  
self-consequences: Self-praise and self-rewards to overcome the feeling of difficulty |
| Self-observation | Self-monitoring: "Process of comparing what the student is doing against the expert model" |
| **Self-reflection phase**  
Includes evidences of students engaging in assessing their work and their reactions to the self-judgments they made. | |
|  
**Self-judgment**  
"Process in which the students assess their work" (Panadero, 2014) |  
Causal attribution: "Self-explanations about the reasons for success or failure"  
Self-evaluation: Students’ assessment of their performance |
|  
Self-reaction | Self-satisfaction: "Affective and cognitive reactions" |