What Makes it Easy or Hard for You to Do Your Homework? An Account of Newcomer Immigrant Youths' Afterschool Academic Lives

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While substantial research has focused on homework in the lives of native-born English-speaking students, research on immigrant students' homework experiences remains scarce. A goal of this study was to describe the homework experiences of newcomer immigrant students, drawing from a project on how individual, family, and school characteristics shape these youths' homework experiences. Focus groups and surveys were conducted with newcomer students (N=192) in an urban high school. Survey data were used to determine the prevalence of homework facilitators and impediments students experienced; focus group data were examined to develop an enhanced understanding of the contexts in which students encounter various facilitators and impediments. Understanding course materials, i.e. having academic English proficiency to comprehend course contents, was a key determinant in whether students experienced homework as easy or difficult. Results can inform ways in which home, school, and after-school settings may be structured to facilitate immigrant youths' homework completion.

Keywords: immigrant youth, English Language Learners, homework, ecological systems, mixed methods

Recent educational reform initiatives in the U.S. have focused attention on raising students' academic achievement. Schools are held accountable for ensuring that all children make adequate progress towards achieving standards aligned with the general curriculum. In this climate, homework has emerged as a potential vehicle to improve achievement. It is a means of extending the school day, as homework is schoolwork assigned to be done outside of class.

Among students who could potentially benefit from the learning opportunities offered by homework is the increasing population of immigrant adolescents. In the United States today, about 12% of the population are foreign-born (Larsen, 2003), and among 262.4 million people aged 5 and over, about 18% speak a non-English language at home (U.S. Census, 2002). More than one in five children are either first- or second-generation immigrants, growing up in homes with at least one foreign-born parent (Mather, 2009); these youth comprise the fastest growing segment of the school-aged population (Hernández, Denton, & Macartney, 2007). Newcomer immigrant youth refer to first-generation immigrants who have recently arrived in the U.S. (typically within 5 years). This paper concerns youth (ages 14-17 yrs) within this group; in particular, it focuses on their homework experiences. Since many immigrant youth learn English and complex academic subjects simultaneously, they often lag behind their native-born English-speaking peers in academic achievement. One way to bridge this gap is through the thoughtful assignment of homework.

Since homework can be tailored to individual student's learning needs, appropriately designed assignments can offer valuable learning opportunities for immigrant youth who need to review course materials and

practice specific skills. There is limited research, however, on academic and developmental needs of newcomer immigrant adolescents; thus, secondary schools are often ill-equipped to address the needs of these newcomers (Ruiz-de-Vélasco, Clewell, & Fix, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). Yet schools represent the primary context of acculturation for immigrant youth, and performance in secondary grades has significant implications for students' decision to continue on to college. Since research shows strong positive relationship between high school achievement and homework completion (Cooper, Robinson, & Patall, 2006), each homework assignment that is out of reach for immigrant students places them at a position of cumulative disadvantage—for failed opportunities to learn, negative teacher perceptions (Weinstein, 2002), lower academic self-efficacy (Schunk, 1991), and academic disengagement over time (Goslin, 2003). Thus, educators need to be informed of factors that facilitate or challenge immigrant students' homework experiences, so that steps can be taken to help them derive maximal benefit from homework.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) which recognizes that academic performance is linked to various characteristics in students' family and school ecologies (Benner, Graham, & Mistry, 2008; Chung & Steinberg, 2006). The ecological systems and the processes that occur within each system are interrelated; the persons or characteristics of one ecological system can influence those found in another system. In this study, the ecological systems model is used as a framework for understanding how various individual, home, school, and outside school activities are associated with newcomer immigrant students' homework completion.

Literature

Relationship between Homework and Academic Achievement

A rich body of literature exists on homework experiences of native-born English speaking students, but research on immigrant students' experiences with homework remains scarce. The existing research has been synthesized in a recent review (Cooper et al., 2006); it demonstrated a general positive relationship between the amount of homework and academic achievement. However, this positive effect of homework on achievement is significant only at the secondary grade levels. There is a moderate correlation between time spent on homework and achievement at the middle school level, while little or no relationship is observed at the elementary grade levels. Thus, the relationship between homework and achievement is not straightforward or uniform across all students.

Some scholars contend that homework can be overwhelming for students, leading to frustration, disengagement from school, and low academic self-efficacy (Bennett & Kalish, 2007; Zimmermann & Kitsantas, 2005).

Homework can also disrupt families, as parent-child conflicts arise over homework, and too much homework often takes time away from family events, extracurricular activities, leisure, and rest (Kralovec & Buell, 2000). Moreover, studies that show positive associations between homework completion and attainment of higher class grades and test scores (Cooper & Valentine, 2001; Tymms, 1992) may in fact be reflecting the socioeconomic advantage of students who have access to resources such as computers, internet, or help from parents or tutors.

Homework and grades. In broad terms, grades are meant to indicate students' mastery of skills and level of understanding in a given course. In practice, however, grades are not limited to students' mastery of the course materials, and doing one's homework is often critical for obtaining good grades. A previous study based on a survey of teachers working with recently arrived immigrant youth (from China, Central America, Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico) showed that the most important determinant of grades is homework completion (Bang, Suárez-Orozco, Pakes, & O'Connor, 2009). Indeed, the literature on grading practices indicates that teacher-assigned grades often take into account students' homework completion and other indicators of effort and classroom behaviors (Brookhart, 1991, 1993; Stiggins, Frisbie, & Griswold, 1989). Such grading practice is supported by a theoretical model of academic achievement (DiPerna & Elliott, 1999, 2000) which asserts that academic competence is a combination of two types of student characteristics: academic skills (i.e., language, mathematics, and critical thinking skills) and academic enablers (i.e., motivation, engagement, interpersonal skills, and study skills). Teachers' consideration of both components in evaluating student achievement is particularly important in immigrant students' grades, since low performance on tests may be less a result of these students' content knowledge and skill than their limited proficiency in the new language (e.g., Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006). Thus, teachers may justifiably seek to give relatively greater weight to factors such as effort, class participation, and homework completion in determining immigrant students' grades (Brookhart, 1994). Although grades are subjective, they identify students as high- or low-achieving, determine the level of classes in which students can enroll, and generally are closely linked to other more objective indicators of students' achievement (Wendel & Anderson, 1994).

Individual Characteristics

English proficiency and academic skills. Limited proficiency in English is a particular impediment to homework completion for immigrant youth, and the challenges are even greater for students with interrupted formal education, as they lack the basic academic skills needed to complete assignments and perform in school (August & Hakuta, 1997). Moreover, not having developed

strong literacy skills in one's native language considerably decreases the chances of acquiring academic language skills in a second language (Genesee et al., 2006).

Additionally, the content of secondary school curricula becomes increasingly complex, and resources available in U.S. schools for adolescent ELLs are more limited in comparison to those available for younger ELLs (Ruiz-de-Vélasco et al., 2001). Without solid instruction in content areas and language support to access the materials being taught in classes, immigrant youth are unlikely to acquire English proficiency regardless of the length of their time in the U.S.; the gap in academic achievement relative to native-born youth will continue to increase (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008).

Academic Engagement. In broad terms, engagement is conceptualized as the extent to which students are involved in their classes and school-related activities (Steinberg, Brown, & Dornbusch, 1996). Engagement is a multi-faceted construct that involves behavioral (e.g., effort, participation), emotional (e.g., enjoyment derived from learning), relational (e.g., sense of connectedness with peers and teachers), as well as cognitive dimensions (e.g., interest in a topic) (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; National Research Council, 2004; Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009). Research has demonstrated that the extent to which students are academically engaged in their classes significantly influences their performance in school (Fredricks et al., 2004; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). The present study examines behavioral and cognitive dimensions of engagement. Prior analyses on data involving newcomer immigrant students indicated that behavioral engagement is an important predictor of homework completion (Bang et al., 2009). Furthermore, research shows that engagement is a prerequisite for learning (Goslin, 2003), and students need to be interested and intellectually engrossed in what is being taught in class in order to learn and be able to apply the skills in completing their homework.

Family Background and Home Environment

Many studies have demonstrated associations between family demographic factors (e.g., socioeconomic status, maternal education, parental employment, racial/ethnic background) and children's achievement (e.g., Ferriss, 2006; Sirin, 2005). The socioeconomic status of a family is among the most important demographic factors related to children's development and academic performance. Some family background and home environment characteristics affect homework completion due to poverty (e.g., limited educational resources, parents working long hours, children having to work in order to support the family), while others are particular to immigrant families. Immigration is a stressful event that often brings about changes in the family system, causing some family relationships to be strained and conflictual (Falicov 1998; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). The process of migration and acculturation frequently involves separation and estrangement between family members, introduction of new members, and cultural/generational gap due to children's and parents' differential rates of adaptation to the U.S. culture (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). In addition, immigrant youth are often asked to take on responsibilities beyond their years, such as childcare, translation, and negotiation, which can sometimes deter students from focusing on school work (Faulstich-Orellana, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008).

Parental involvement. A review of research on native-born students' parental involvement in homework has shown that across all grade levels, students who receive parents' assistance and support tend to achieve higher, outperforming their peers with relatively less-involved parents in accuracy, consistency, and quality of completed assignments (Hoover-Dempsey, Battiato, Walker, Reed, DeJong, & Jones, 2001). However, immigrant parents may be unable to attend to their children's schooling and provide homework help to the extent that many parents of native-born, middle- to upper-class youth often do. Some may have received limited formal schooling or education in another language; they may not be familiar with the U.S. school system. Nevertheless, parental homework help can take many forms. These include having regular discussions about what children are learning in classes, providing emotional support and encouragement, helping to develop learning strategies and work habits, and ensuring that their children's homework is completed (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001; Xu, 2004).

School Environment

Many studies have shown that student engagement and achievement are increased in school environments that ensure physical safety, promote positive social norms, provide opportunities to develop skills within warm, supportive relationships, and convey high expectations for academic achievement (e.g., Hoy & Sabo, 1998; Phillips, 1997; Shouse, 1997).

Previous research involving immigrant students indicated that many of them attend schools with high levels of poverty and segregation (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). Students in these contexts have limited access to educational resources and few opportunities to interact with peers of the dominant culture (Kozol, 2005). In some schools, ELLs may be isolated in English as Second Language tracks, where they may experience unchallenging classes, low expectations, and embarrassment due to their slow acquisition of academic English (Olsen, 1997; Valdés, 1998). Problems such as lack of discipline and violence that often afflict high-poverty schools threaten the physical safety of students, leading them to focus their energies on remaining safe rather than on learning (Gronna & Chin-Chance, 1999; Prothrow-Stith & Quaday, 1995).

Outside School Supports/Homework Help and Resources

The availability of someone who can provide homework help is associated with higher homework completion rates and greater enjoyment of the learning experience (Xu, 2005; Xu & Corno, 2003). For many youths, the often isolating experience of working on assignments instead of activities that involve socializing with others seems to contribute to their negative attitude toward homework (Xu, 2005). Especially for youths who are struggling in school, homework that is overly challenging, repetitive, uninteresting, or too lengthy can lead to frustration, impatience, low self-esteem, and low academic self-efficacy (Zimmermann & Kitsantas, 2005).

Homework help centers or tutoring programs can provide a set place and time for students to complete their assignments, thus helping them manage their afterschool hours efficiently and ensuring an environment that is conducive to academic work. By structuring students' afterschool schedules and offering educational resources, homework centers may further increase the time that students dedicate to academic work, and time spent on homework is generally positively associated with homework completion, accuracy, and achievement (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2007). Furthermore, newcomer immigrant youths can benefit from the language support provided by teachers, gain insight and learning strategies by working with peers, and develop skills in using reference materials that can help them in future assignments. Whether or not immigrant students have access to such help and resources can significantly impact their homework experiences and determine the success with which they complete their assignments.

This brief review points to numerous factors that may shape immigrant students' homework experiences. Yet little is known about the homework experiences of newcomer immigrant students. Since homework, particularly in high school, has been recognized to help students achieve in school (Cooper et al., 2006), and given newcomer immigrant students' need to acquire academic English language proficiency, research is needed to help develop a better understanding of the factors that influence homework experiences among this population.

The Present Study

This study is based on a subset of data I collected for a broader project on the homework experiences and academic adaptation of recently arrived immigrant youth in the U.S. Given the limited research on homework experiences of newcomer immigrant students, a primary objective of the project was descriptive; the research question guiding this study is: What are the facilitators and impediments to homework completion for immigrant students attending a newcomer school? Focus groups were conducted to gather reports from immigrant youth about the various factors that affect their homework completion; the resulting data informed questions to be included in a subsequent questionnaire. This study utilizes a subset of the quantitative data derived from the surveys, as well as data collected through focus group discussions.

Method

Study Setting and Participants

Participants were students from International High School at Prospect Heights, a newcomer school in New York City (referred to hereafter as "International High School"). This school is a part of the Internationals Network for Public Schools, a non-profit organization that addresses the educational needs of recent immigrant students in 9th through 12th grades who have limited proficiency in English.

The International High School was opened in 2004 and is one of the most recently established sites. In 2007-2008, it served about 450 students, operating as one of four small schools housed in a building that was formerly a single high school. It accepts a diverse group of newcomer students who have spent less than four years in the U.S. at the time of admission. These students, who have scored at an intermediate level or below on the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT), come from over fifty different countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, Central and South America. Some enter the school with a solid formal educational background, while others have had almost no formal schooling. As a school designed to serve first generation newcomer immigrants, the International High School was an appropriate site at which to conduct research that aims to shed light on the academic adaptation and homework experiences of recently arrived immigrant youth in a U.S. school.

Procedures

A brief presentation of the project was given before all teachers at International High School during a faculty meeting. All teachers expressed interest in the project; IRB approvals were obtained from the author's institution and from the NYC Department of Education. Each teacher received permission forms and letters describing the study to parents to be distributed to students in their respective advisory groups. Numerous efforts were made to obtain signed parental permission forms (e.g., incentives, party for the advisory group with the highest return rate). Administrators and teachers also helped by requesting parents' permission when they came to school for parent-teacher conferences, and almost all parents agreed to have their child participate in the project.

Data collection times were scheduled to take place after school (for focus groups) and during 50-minute independent reading periods (for surveys). A total of four 45-60 minute focus groups were conducted with students across grades 9 through 12 (See Appendix A for focus group protocol). With the help of the school's special programs coordinator, participants were recruited so that each group would be balanced by gender. Attempts were made to recruit students of varying achievement levels and

countries of origin, but given the constraints of scheduling and the voluntary participation of students, selection bias may have been introduced; thus, the focus group data are not generalized beyond the participants. Each group included 4 to 7 participants (one group of 4 students, two groups of 5 students, and one group of 7 students); a total of 21 students participated in the four focus groups. A brief description of students in each group is presented in Table 1.

Focus groups. Focus groups were moderated by trained bilingual / bicultural research assistants (RAs), each accompanied by a non-participating observer whose task was to take detailed notes on elements that could not be captured in discussions, such as participants' body language, facial expressions, or behaviors in interactions with other group members. All focus group discussions were audio-recorded.

The focus groups elicited a rich set of first-hand, contextualized accounts on participants' homework experiences and identified specific facilitators and impediments that newcomer immigrant students encounter in completing homework assignments in the U.S. school system. These focus groups also offered considerable flexibility in exploring new ideas that emerged during the data collection process and investigate unanticipated factors that act as homework facilitators or impediments (Seal, Bogart, & Ehrhardt, 1998). The responses provided during these discussions served to refine measures to be included in the survey so that it posed culturally relevant questions about factors influencing immigrant students' homework experiences. Focus groups offered a means of gathering rich data contextualized in the lives of the participants. Students could build on and respond to the comments from other group members. Moreover, as the participants were English Language Learners, communication was facilitated by peers with relatively more advanced English proficiency (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007).

The focus group data provided student perspectives about the type and importance of various facilitators and impediments to homework completion. The data also informed items included in the subsequent survey, designed to gather information about a variety of factors associated with homework completion. It was designed to gather information about a variety of factors associated with homework completion.

Table 1

Description of focus group participants

Group	Gender & Grade Level	Countries of Origin	Home Language	Length of time in the U.S.
1	M: two 9th F: two 9th & one 11th	Haiti, Dominican Republic, Philippines, Sierra Leone	Kreyol, Spanish, Filipino, Mende	6 months – 5 years
2	M: two 9th & one 10th F: one 9th	China, Haiti, Mexico	Mandarin, Kreyol, Spanish	1.5 years – 3 years

3	M: two 9th &
	  two 10th
	F: one 9th &
	  two 10th
		Honduras, Mexico, Bangladesh	Spanish, Bengali	8 months – 8 years

4	M: one 12th F: one 11th & three 12th	Dominican Republic, Gabon, Haiti, South Africa	Spanish, French, Kreyol, Zulu	3 years – 5 years

Survey on homework experiences. For the survey, two lists of reasons (facilitators and impediments) were generated based on focus group discussions and literature regarding factors associated with students' homework experiences (See Appendix B for the complete lists of items). Students were asked, "Which of the reasons listed below make it HARD / EASY for you to do your homework?", and they were to check all reasons that applied to them (e.g., I do not understand the lesson; The assignment is explained step by step.) Responses were coded dichotomously, with 1= "Yes" and 0= "No."

The survey items were piloted with five high school students (of whom two were English language learners); all items were translated by professionals into six languages that were most commonly used as the primary/home language of students at the International High School: Spanish, Chinese, French, Haitian Kreyol, Bengali, and Arabic. (The diverse language(s) that students reported using at home are displayed Figure 1.) Each translated survey was back-translated and reviewed by native speakers of the target language to assess whether the questions were linguistically and age-appropriate; they also examined the items to ensure that the intended meanings were accurately conveyed.

The survey was administered by a team of trained bilingual research assistants (RAs). All ninth and tenth graders who were present on the survey day were asked to participate. A total of 192 students agreed to participate and completed the survey, corresponding to a response rate of 97 percent. The sample was balanced by student gender (n of boys = 99, or 52%); the mean student age was 16 (SD= 1.07 years); and, participants came from diverse regions: 11 (6%) from Africa, 55 (31%) from Caribbean, 44 (25%) from Central/South America, 25 (14%) from East Asia, 34 (19%) from South/Southeast Asia, and 9 (5%) from Eastern Europe/Other. According to students' reports, about 59 percent (n= 114) of their mothers and 49 percent of their fathers (n=95) had completed high school education or less. As for their parents' employment status, 50 percent of mothers (n=96) and 72 percent of fathers (n=139) were working outside the home.

In addition to the focus groups and surveys conducted with students, I also interviewed eight purposefully selected teachers (from various subject areas and grade levels) to understand the kinds of homework students received. The interview protocol included questions on the amount and type of homework that were typically assigned, relationships between homework and class work or tests, teacher perceptions about their students' capacity to complete homework, and any accommodations or adjustments made to facilitate their students' homework experiences. Findings from the interviews are reported elsewhere (Bang, in press).
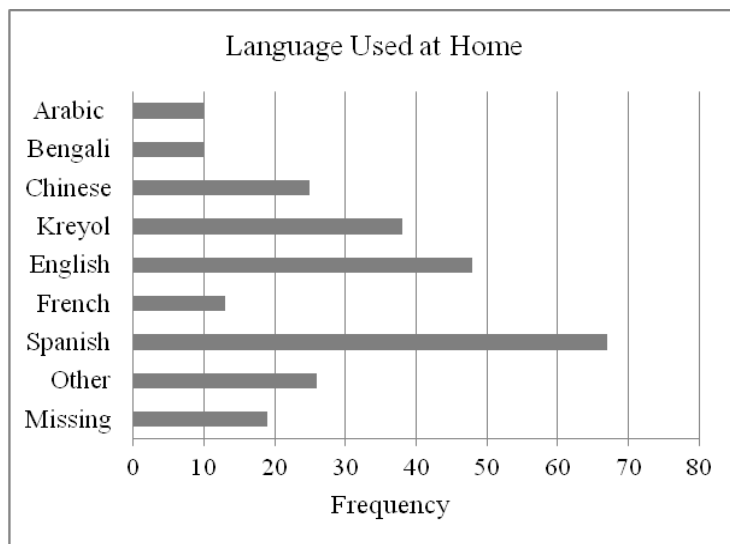

Figure 1. Number of students who reported using the language at home.

Note: Total is greater than N=192 because many students reported using more than 1 language at home: 96 students reported two languages, 58 reported three or more languages. Other category includes 6 or less of the following: Albanian, Fuzhounese, Ewe, Fuliani, Nepali, Polish, Punjabi, Russian, Tibetan, and Urdu.

Analysis

All focus group discussions were transcribed. The interview transcripts were organized and analyzed using ATLAS/ti. This qualitative data analysis program facilitated taking memos, development of inductive and deductive codes to be applied across the qualitative data, as well as categorization and thematic analysis. I read the transcripts and listened to the recordings multiple times and wrote memos and annotations, giving particular attention to students' responses about the various facilitators and impediments that they encounter in completing homework. The data were then fractured into phrases and sorted into broader categories.

While the topics covered during the focus group discussions provided several coding categories, most codes were developed inductively during analysis, using grounded theory approaches based on the data. An open-coding process using phrases as the unit of analysis was employed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). I analyzed the content, extracted keywords, and identified emergent descriptive themes from the transcripts, generating a comprehensive set of 35 first-level codes (e.g., not knowing what the homework is, having clear, detailed instructions to complete assignment). Then, similar codes were combined to reduce redundancy in coding categories. Larger chunks of data could then be sorted, and general patterns could be identified. For example, getting good grades and praise from teachers or parents were combined into a higher-level coding category labeled rewards/encouragement.

The data were then organized in a table in which each row was labeled with codes. More specific codes, definitions, and illustrative quotations of each code were displayed in adjacent cells. Subsequent tables were created by individual characteristics (e.g., fatigue, fear of mistakes) home environment features (e.g., parents' encouragement) school environment features (e.g., starting homework with teacher), and out-of-school factors (e.g., jobs). Examining the data in this way helped identify homework facilitators and impediments in relation to the ecological systems framework.

This coding scheme was presented to two colleagues who have expertise in psychological development and academic adaptation of immigrant youth. They were asked to independently code all focus group transcripts and to generate coding categories. The two colleagues and I refined the coding scheme through discussion of each code and its relationship with other codes. We established rules for determining when a code was to be assigned. Coding cross-checks were performed by tallying the number of agreements and disagreements between two colleagues and myself. The formula for inter-coder reliability was: agreement/ (agreement + disagreement) with a target rate of 85% reliability as the lowest acceptable level for each category (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The team obtained an inter-coder

reliability of 90%. Disagreements in coding were resolved through discussion and consultation with another expert in school psychology and immigration studies until complete agreement was achieved.

The focus groups generated rich data that informed the questions to be included in a subsequent survey, which was designed to gather information about a variety of factors associated with newcomer immigrants' academic adaptation and homework experiences.

The survey data were examined descriptively. I first counted the number of students who answered "Yes" to having experienced each facilitator and impediment and calculated the percentages to see the prevalence of each homework facilitator or impediment among the students. On average, each student reported 7.2 (SD = 4.05) total facilitators and 4.1 (SD = 3.28) total impediments. Examination of the relative frequency and prevalence of homework facilitators and impediments reported by all 9th and 10th grade students indicated that the ecological systems model can be applied to understand the factors as originating from the individual-, home-, school-, and out-of-school systems. This categorization, along with the focus group data, allowed me to gain insights into how newcomer immigrant students' homework experiences are shaped by various factors in contexts in which they engage routinely.

Results

This section presents the descriptive statistics of the specific homework impediments and facilitators and categorizes them into individual, home, school, and out of school/ extracurricular systems. The data from focus groups are also presented, along with interpretations of how specific factors operate to shape students' homework experiences.

Prevalence of Homework Impediments

The number of students who responded "yes" to statements describing a specific factor that may either help or hinder their homework efforts were counted (e.g., "having clear instructions about the homework assignment" "not having the necessary materials I need to do homework"). Of the impediments to homework completion, the most salient factors were related to having limited understanding of the course materials (50.5 percent of participants), or having difficulty with English (40.6 percent of participants). The least frequently reported impediments included not being organized (8.3 percent), getting limited feedback from the teacher (8.9 percent), and having a job (9.4 percent). In broad terms, the impediments fell into the following seven types, in descending order from the most frequently reported to the least frequently reported impediment: Limited understanding; Fatigue; Motivational issues; Organizational issues; Competing environmental demands; High standards; and Limited access to help or resources to complete homework. Table 2 displays the number and percentage of students who reported experiencing specific homework impediments.

Table 2

Total number and percentage of students who responded having experienced each homework impediment

Homework impediments	Type	*n* of respondents	% of respondents
Limited Understanding	Limited Academic Skills	97	50.5
Problem with vocab in HW		78	40.6
Limited English proficiency		64	33.3
Not reviewing lessons		21	10.9
Too much HW	Fatigue	78	40.6
Too tired		55	28.6
Forgetting HW materials	Organization issue	48	25.0
Leaving HW till last minute		45	23.4
Not knowing what HW was assigned		43	22.4
Lack of organization		16	8.3
Fear of mistakes	High standards	40	20.8
Not happy with quality of own work		23	12.0
Lack of will/desire to do HW	Motivation Issue	31	16.1
Boredom/lack of interest in topic		31	16.1
Chores	Competing environmental demands	27	14.1
No quiet place		21	10.9
Job		18	9.4
Limited teacher feedback	Limited help/resources	17	8.9
No materials to do HW		17	8.9

The factors influencing homework completion were then categorized using the ecological systems model framework that guided the study. Most of the homework impediments (about 86 percent of all impediments reported by students) fell under individual student characteristics (e.g., Limited academic skills; too much homework; Fatigue; Forgetting homework materials). Less than 10 percent of student-reported impediments were related to home environment characteristics, and less than 3 percent of the impediments were related to school environment or extracurricular/afterschool contexts. Figure 2 displays the distribution of homework impediments across the ecological systems.
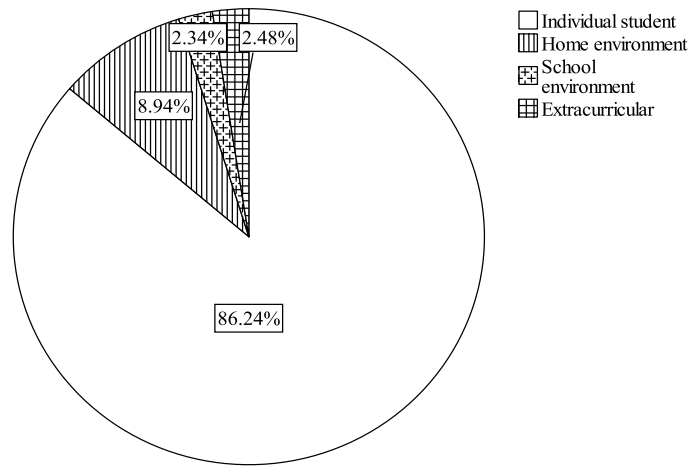
Figure 2. Ecological systems categorization of Homework Impediments

Table 3

Ecological systems categorization of Homework Impediments

Individual	Limited Understanding
	Problem with vocab in HW
	Too much HW
	Limited English proficiency
	Too tired
	Forgetting HW materials
	Leaving HW till last minute
	Not knowing what HW was assigned
	Fear of mistakes
	Lack of will/desire to do HW
	Boredom/lack of interest in topic
	Not happy with quality of own work
	Not reviewing lessons
	Lack of organization
Home	Chores
	No quiet place
School	Limited teacher feedback
Out of School/ extracurricular	Job

Focus Group Discussion of Homework Impediments

Although the students tended to attribute a disproportionate number of homework impediments to individual student characteristics, an examination of qualitative data indicated that many of the individual level factors interacted with factors in their greater ecological contexts. The responses from the students in focus groups complemented the survey data and shed light on the interaction between the individual and contextual factors.

Limited academic skills and too much homework. The most commonly discussed impediments in focus groups were related to not understanding the course materials and having limited English proficiency; this language barrier, in turn, prevented students from fully grasping the meaning of materials. Limited understanding further led students to feel overwhelmed, as they needed to exert greater effort and time to complete assignments. A number of students concurred with Jorge and Wen, 9th grade students from Mexico and China, respectively:

Jorge: Homework is a lot because we really not understand a lot of English so… we have some of the words that we don't understand and we have to translate and everything and I think with that it's a lot of work.

Wen: Sometimes the words in the question, they are too difficult. I don't understand it.

Thus, completing homework assignments in English demanded more time and energy from newcomers than it would have from native English-speaking students. The resulting feeling of burden is illustrated in an exchange amongst 9th graders from Honduras, Mexico, and Bangladesh:

Remi: English is hard.

Luis: Yeah, Global [studies] is hard too. [Why is it hard?] Because I don't understand the language.

Annie: Sometimes they like give us a quote and we have to write an essay on it ... and writing essay is hard. It takes a really long time.

These remarks suggest that newcomer students need extra help and supports to facilitate their homework completion. Yet not all students readily had access to such help.

Limited help or access to resources. Immigrant parents are often unable to provide direct homework help that students need. A Haitian 10th grade boy stated: "When I came here, like last year in 9th grade I never did my homework cuz I didn't understand what to do, like we're immigrants, and in New York, parents work and don't have much time to help you." His statement was supported by responses from other students:

9th grade Chinese girl: My mom, she don't help me because she comes home like seven or eight o'clock. She's so tired.

10th grade Mexican boy: I don't ask my mom or father because they learn how to talk English, but they don't know how to read or do homework

9th grade Mexican boy: My father comes home at eleven and he doesn't have time.

Clearly, schools must provide adequate instructional support and homework help for these students to compensate for the limited help they can receive at home.

Motivation, organization, and competing environmental demands. Like all students, whether immigrant or not, certain types of facilitators such as Motivation, Organization, and Competing environmental demands serve as impediments to getting homework done, in varying degrees. Student responses elicited through focus groups allowed for contextualization of these impediments. For instance, a statement from 12th grade girl from Gabon illustrated how motivation or engagement in an assignment and organizational skills such as time management can interact to pose challenges in doing homework:

12th grade Gabon girl: One time I don't want to do homework is like these journals… just about what we read and the words we looked up. I have to write in it like three times a week, and usually I don't do it. I wait till the last minute cuz um the teacher collects them like after a certain period of time like a month… so I have missing assignments but then I have to it cuz I know she's going to collect it so I do like six in a row.

Students also described how organizational issues such as procrastination can be compounded with competing environmental demands, including television, household chores, and other responsibilities. A frequently mentioned source of distraction was the television:

9th grade boy from Bangladesh: Sometimes at home, other people are watching TV so you watch too, and when you wanna do homework, it's too late, and so you sleep and then the next day you aren't ready for class.

12th grade girl from Dominican Republic: Television, I mean like if there's a show that just comes on every Thursday, like Lost, I might choose to just watch that rather than do homework

Some immigrant students, particularly girls, had responsibilities at home that interfered with their ability to get their homework done. A student described how requests

from parents often made it difficult for her to do homework:

10th grade girl from Bangladesh: When I start to do homework and concentrate really hard, something that happens a lot for me, like every day, is …my mom calls, and says, Annie, do this, do that, and I'll be like, let me do my homework and then I will do it. But then I start to do chores and stuff, and a call comes, like from my friend, and they will never hang up the phone before an hour, and I'll have to speak with them. It happens every day….My mom, she works four days a week, so it's really hard to do homework… and I have to maintain every single thing and also do my homework so it's really hard."

Interplay of homework impediments in students' lives. For some students, types of impediments such as Competing environmental demands, Limited access to resources to do homework, and having High standards together interacted as impediments. An exchange between 12th grade girls from Gabon (Jasmin) and Dominican Republic (Lesly) illustrates this interplay:

Jasmin: My door, the lock is messed up and I always have my family. They live close by and I have little cousins they always come in so I cannot concentrate and whenever I do something I like to put my complete thought into it so I almost never have that chance. I'd rather not do something if I am not gonna do it right, so I'd rather not even bother.

Lesly: Like me, my ...the room, I share with my little sister and my aunt, so she comes in, she puts the TV on, and I cannot do nothin' with the TV… so if I go in the living room, my mom is in the room and she's watching TV, so then my dad comes in the living room and watches games, like basketball, soccer, and like we have speakers, like boom boom boom and I am like in the corner trying to concentrate and looking at him like with evil eyes [laughs] that's how it is so... I can't go anywhere. I have the Brooklyn library over there but the library, sometimes I don't like the library cuz they're not really updated…

Jasmin: Yeah, so their books are kinda old and also the computer thing, you have to get off after thirty minutes and then if it's too much people then you have to wait for them to get off ... so it's really annoying.

These students recognized that their school offered afterschool homework help sessions, where they could ask questions to teachers and gain access to the Internet and other educational resources. An unexpected finding, however, was that homework help centers did not always provide the support needed by some students, particularly 11th and 12th graders and those with relatively more advanced English skills. These students were expected to help beginner ELLs and others who were having difficulty with their homework; thus, they were unable to use the time and environment designated for completing their own assignments:

12th grade girl from South Africa: We have homework help, but the thing is, if we go we are not gonna get our homework done ... We have to help others cuz we are 12th graders. We're supposed to know everything. We are supposed to help. And you get distracted. Even in class sometimes that happens... [sounds of agreement from other participants]. You don't get your things done cuz you have to go and help people

This quotation illustrates how a factor that is generally expected to facilitate homework completion (e.g., afterschool homework centers, peer tutors) can also serve as an impediment. In the following section, I examine the homework facilitators reported by students and present an analysis which parallels that of homework impediments.

Prevalence of Homework Facilitators

The student survey data on homework facilitators revealed that the most frequently reported factor was knowing or understanding the course material (75.5 percent of participants). Having clear instructions (59.9 percent) and having the assignment broken down into smaller steps (58.3 percent) were also among the most frequently reported facilitators; this finding stressed the importance of understanding the content and/or language in order to be able to complete homework. The other major homework facilitators were being interested in the topic or subject the assignment is for (68.2 percent), and getting good grades (63.0 percent); these factors would make homework completion easier for all students, not just for the participants in this study. Somewhat surprisingly, the least frequently reported homework facilitators included not having to do chores around the house (16.7 percent), receiving rewards from parents (18.2 percent), and attending homework help centers (18.8 percent).

These facilitators can be grouped into five broad types: Knowing/understanding course materials, Help/access to resources, Environment conducive to doing homework, Rewards/encouragement, and Use of one's native language. Table 4 shows the number and percentage of participants who reported having experienced each of the homework facilitators.

Applying the ecological systems framework to examine the homework facilitators revealed a notable difference between the distributions of facilitators and impediments discussed earlier. While most of the impediments fell under the individual student characteristics, homework facilitators were relatively

evenly distributed throughout the ecological systems. Individual student characteristics still comprised the most frequently reported facilitators (37.4 percent), but home environment and school environment characteristics also represented substantial   proportion of the facilitators, 27.2

percent and   23.1 percent, respectively. About 12.3 percent of the homework facilitators were related to extracurricular or afterschool contexts. The   distribution of homework facilitators   across the ecological systems is presented   in   Figure   3   and   Table   5.
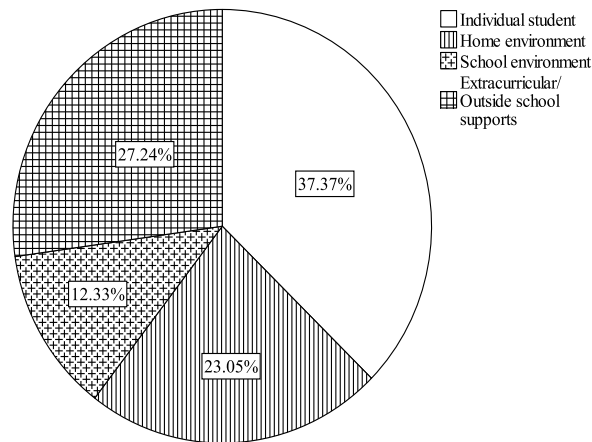
Figure 3. Ecological systems categorization of Homework Facilitators

Table 4

Total number and percentage of students who reported having experienced each homework facilitator

Homework facilitators	Type	*n* of respondents	% of respondents
Understand course material		145	75.5
Interested in topic	Know/understand material	131	68.2
Clear instructions		115	59.9
HW broken down in to small steps		112	58.3
To get good grades		121	63.0
Parents' encouragement		66	34.4
Mentor's encouragement	Rewards/encouragement	60	31.3
Praise from teacher		51	26.6
Rewards from parents		35	18.2
Available reference materials		101	52.6
Starting HW in class with teacher	Help/access to resources	87	45.3
Friends' help		72	37.5
HW help center		36	18.8
Quiet Place to do HW	Conductive environment for HW	80	41.7
No Chores		32	16.7
Translation of HW and instructions	Use if native language	62	32.3
Doing HW in native language		56	29.2

Table 5

Ecological systems categorization of homework facilitators

Individual	Understand course material
	Interested in topic
	Clear instructions
	Translation of HW and instructions
	Doing HW in native language
	To get good grades
Home	Available reference materials
	Quiet place to do HW
	Parents' encouragement
	Rewards from parents
	No Chores
School	HW broken down in to small steps
	Starting HW in class with teacher
	Praise from teacher
Out of school / extracurricular	Friends' help
	Mentor's encouragement
	HW help center

Focus Group Discussions of Homework Facilitators

The broad categories of homework facilitators identified from survey results also emerged in student focus group discussions. Many participants acknowledged the value of homework and recognized it as a means of reinforcing, extending, and deepening their understanding of the materials covered in class. One 10th grade boy from Bangladesh noted:

If you go home and like don't do anything, like not be in touch with homework, with lesson,… I'll forget everything so it's very important to keep in touch with those things. Yeah besides it's not possible for a teacher to teach everything in one hour, so he or she gives homework to cover it at home so that the student can learn something. That also proves what did you learn from that class, if you can do your homework.

In another focus group with 11th and 12th graders, two girls from Dominican Republic (Lesly) and South Africa (Kyra) said:

Lesly: You learn. Like for example for math, if you don't practice, you forget it. Everybody knows that.

Kyra: Yeah, and it's for your own understanding, cuz for the homework, it might just be, explaining the subject, … like you might have questions that if you didn't do the homework, you wouldn't have had before so you know it expands your knowledge.

Knowing / understanding course materials. When asked to talk about some things that help them get their homework done, students also commented on their understanding of the course materials and the steps required to complete the given assignments. The following exchange is between two girls, Lesly, an 11th grader from Dominican Republic and Jasmin, a 12th grader from Gabon:

Lesly: If you understand it, if you understand the homework, what to do, and in class, you already have a pretty good, … an idea of what to do when you go home, then homework would be easy. It just flows. But if you go home and you're like how did the teacher explain …then you're stuck.

Jasmin   It also depends on the teacher cuz different people have different teaching styles… I remember like

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comparing my previous history teacher and the one that I have now… Mr. P., the one I had before, he would really explain what we are supposed to write about and we would have some background and insight about it. And we have to do this, that, and that, in order to get to the final thing… Now it's basically,… just one class, he said something quick about a topic and you have to start.

Use of one's native language. For 9th and 10th grade students with limited English proficiency, knowing or understanding assignments entailed the use of their native languages. When students could get translations from peers or help from a teacher who knows the students' native language, completing homework was relatively easier. In a focus group with 9th and 10th grade students from China, Haiti, and Mexico, students made the following comments:

Student: As an international school they should have teachers that speak other languages, for all the languages especially to help students that don't understand their assignments.
Student: Or if there's a student in the same class that speaks your language, if he or she understands what they are doing the teacher should ask that person to help us.
Student: Yeah, you need someone to help you with your homework, someone to translate.

Rewards/encouragement. Another main category of homework facilitators were Rewards/ encouragement, such as extra credit and higher grades, praise from parents, and encouragement from mentors. Some students reported practical, instrumental reasons that motivated them to complete homework, as illustrated in the following exchange amongst 10th graders from Bangladesh:

Student: The positive thing about homework is that I can get extra credit if I do homework.
Student: If you don't hand it in,…you lose points.
Student: Yeah your grade goes down.

Other students' comments also indicated that they are inclined to complete their assignments because homework completion can affect how teachers evaluate them. For example, Jasmin, a 12th grade girl from Gabon remarked:

If you do your homework, it makes you look better [laughs]. You don't want teacher to think bad about you, see what I mean? Like sometimes you are asked to do homework because you want to do something like an activity with the homework, and if you didn't do it, it looks bad you know, just in general. For example, back in my junior year, you want something, like the internship, you're looking

for an internship and right now and then the teacher might know somebody who's interested in what you are doing and if he sees the way you are in class, you know not doing your work and stuff, he might not think that he can trust you. He might say that you act the same way over there the same way you do in class, so this is bad.

Students also described rewards and encouragements from parents that helped them complete homework. Their remarks show how these rewards and encouragements shape the home environment and interact with individual characteristics to promote homework completion. Annie, a 10th grade girl from Bangladesh, reported:

Every year if I get A's and B's only, [my parents] give me a present. Like this year I got a cell phone ...They saw good results, and they just took me to a store and were like, here, pick one. ... They give me like options, if you do this, I will give you this, if you don't I will never let you do this.

A 10th grade Mexican boy commented on how his father encourages him to do homework:

My father asks me if my homework is done when he gets home from work. He always says that he's not that good and tells me to do my homework to achieve a higher level than him. My father, he never got enough school and he thinks I can reach higher and homework is important for that.

By simply checking to see that homework is completed, asking about what their children are learning at school, parents could encourage their children to focus on their schoolwork. Even discipline served as a way to encourage homework completion. One 9th grade Haitian boy described how his mother monitors his homework:

When she's at work she's always calling me, asking if I am doing my homework or if I don't understanding something. Then she tells me to,… I just go to the library to look up some books and finish it because I know she's gonna ask about it.

Additionally, Kyra, a 12th grade South African girl shared the following comment with the group:

My dad, he tells me to do my homework, cuz he'll be checking, and if I didn't do it, he can whoop me up …. even if I'm sleeping. So I probably won't do it if he doesn't tell me to do it. He always asks me if I got homework, cuz my dad, you don't play, he want me to do my homework all the time.

Furthermore, if students were motivated and interested by the homework they were more likely to complete it:

Kyra: If you like what you're doing right now in class of course you will do it.

Jasmin: I am personally moved to do homework whenever it's something I am particularly interested about like if it's for math it's really rare for me to do it ... [laughs] Just like, in general, if something does not motivate me to something about it... there's a big chance that I would not do it... I'd probably just rather watch television or go to sleep. [laughs]

Help or access to resources and environment conducive to doing homework. Other homework facilitators were access to help or resources such as the Internet, and environment that is conducive to studying. The following comments illustrate how these facilitators interact with each other and influence students' homework completion:

An exchange between students from Dominican Republic and South Africa show how the Internet and friends can serve as sources of homework help:

Lesly: Internet. I cannot do my homework without Internet.

Kyra: Me, I talk to friends. I call them all the time, like one o'clock in the morning and I go, you're doing your homework? Yeah. Because most of the time we all are doing our homework at two, one o'clock in the morning ... [why so late?]

Lesly: Cuz it's just the way it is.

Kyra: You go on the internet, on msn, all of them are there, you just go and ask a question ... and you chat chat chat [laughs]

Lesly: Yeah, msn, it's faster and it's there all the time, twenty-four hours.

Lesly, the 11th grader from Dominican Republic further elaborated on her room, where she does her homework, in talking about the facilitators:

There's like a little learning environment going on … I have a lot of books about just Cleopatra, Anne Frank. I have stuff about Surrealism. I have books about nature, how we could just more simply, stuff like that, so um yeah whenever I look at that, I feel inspired to do the homework.

In sum, the findings based on survey data and focus group data complement one another and are consistent with the ecological systems model. Homework completion was affected by a wide range of characteristics related to individual students, home environments, school environments, and extracurricular/ outside school contexts, many of which could function as impediments and also serve as facilitators. The focus group data shed light on the interrelated processes affecting homework completion from students' perspective. The individual student characteristics were influenced by and interacted with characteristics of the other ecological systems. Many of the individual characteristics challenging homework completion could be mitigated by factors in the home, school, or afterschool contexts, resulting in increased homework completion among the participants.

Discussion

Facilitators and Impediments to Immigrant Students' Homework Completion

Whether or not students understood their course materials was a major factor affecting their homework completion. As newcomer immigrants, their limited English proficiency played a primary role in the extent to which the participants understood their lessons and the assignments given to them. Data from focus groups indicated that figuring out homework instructions and translating unfamiliar words in the assignments consumed a considerable amount of time and effort, leading students to feel overwhelmed and burdened by homework. Thus, in broad terms, limited understanding of course materials, often due to limited English proficiency, and fatigue resulting from the energy and time demanded by homework were the two major categories encompassing homework impediments. Conversely, understanding the course material and having supports to overcome the language barrier (e.g., clear instructions, homework broken down into smaller steps, reference materials) comprised the two major categories of homework facilitators.

Academic English proficiency: a prerequisite for homework. The fact that successful completion of homework is heavily dependent on students' English proficiency corroborates the findings from an earlier study (Bang et al., 2009) that examined the relationships between homework completion, course understanding, and English language skills of recently arrived immigrant youth. The study showed overall positive associations between students' homework completion and their academic achievement as indicated by teacher evaluations of students' course understanding. Yet this positive association between homework completion and course understanding was substantial only for youth with relatively high levels of English language proficiency. For youth with lower levels of English language proficiency, completion of homework had little positive associations with their achievement of understanding the course materials. These patterns from both studies indicate that teachers across the curriculum need to first and foremost help students master English. Without proficiency in academic English, each assignment that is inaccessible to immigrant youth increases the educational disparities between these youth and their native-born English speaking peers. This finding also underscores the need for teachers to carefully design

homework and make necessary adjustments so that the tasks are appropriate for each student's level of academic skills. If thoughtfully assigned, homework represents precious opportunities for newcomer immigrant students to build proficiency in academic English critical for performing grade-level work. However, if the homework is ill-suited to students' learning needs, it can potentially do more harm than good.

Factors common to all students' homework experiences. Several categories of factors influencing homework completion were those that would most likely affect all students, regardless of whether or not they were of immigrant origin. These categories were motivation or engagement, organizational skills, and characteristics of environments in which students do their homework. Consistent with the existing literature on engagement (e.g., Fredricks et al., 2004; Goslin, 2003), being interested in the topic of a given assignment made homework completion easier for students. Not surprisingly, inadequate organizational skills (e.g., forgetting materials needed for homework, procrastination) made homework completion a challenge for a considerable number of students. Further, having a quiet place to study or an environment was important for students' homework completion.

The descriptive data on homework facilitators and impediments also confirmed the existing body of research applying the ecological systems framework (e.g., Benner et al., 2008; Cook, Herman, Phillips, & Settersen, 2002). Many of the homework impediments were individual student characteristics (e.g., limited academic skills, motivation, organization, high standards); these individual characteristics interacted with factors in other ecological systems in influencing homework completion. Focus group data revealed that impediments at the individual level may be mediated by facilitators in home environment (e.g., encouragement from parents), school environment (e.g., teacher feedback, grades), and outside school contexts (e.g., homework centers, friends' help). This interplay of factors across ecological systems shaped students' homework experiences.

Factors unique to study participants. A noteworthy finding is that while facilitators were fairly evenly distributed across the ecological systems, the majority of impediments were attributed to individual characteristics. It seems that the students generally had high levels of internal locus of control (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2003) perceiving themselves as agents of certain outcomes (e.g., successful completion of homework), rather than believing that fate, luck or other external circumstances determine the outcomes. This finding indicates that given access to adequate resources and appropriate guidance, these students would likely to take initiative and direct their behaviors to realizing their goals.

Additionally, an unexpected finding, (i.e. some students' experiences with homework help centers), illustrated the interaction between individual characteristics (academic skills, English proficiency) and extracurricular/ afterschool contexts (homework center), influencing these participants' homework completion. While homework help center provided the much-needed support for struggling students or students with limited English proficiency, it could hinder homework completion for more advanced students, as they felt obliged to serve as peer tutors.

Factors such as not wanting to do the assignment or having to do chores around the house were relatively minor hindrances to homework completion among the participants in this study. One explanation for this finding may be that students recognized the value of homework, as 9th and 10th grade students from Sierra Leone and Dominican Republic noted: "The homework is for you, for your future," "Yeah, you learn… and if you don't do your homework, you don't learn anything, you lose." Another explanation may be that impediments such as lack of will or desire to do homework and competing demands on students' time were mitigated by potent facilitators such as getting good grades and positive feedback from adults.

Implications

This study offers insight into newcomer immigrant students' homework experiences and the factors that impact their homework completion. The specific factors that newcomer immigrants in this study reported as facilitators or impediments to their homework completion have implications for teachers and afterschool programs. According to this study's results, the most significant factor affecting students' homework completion involves whether or not they understand the course materials. Participants' limited understanding of course materials and difficulty with the language involved in the assignment or the instructions were major reasons for their inability to complete their homework. This finding highlights not only the importance of homework for immigrant youth to provide them with additional opportunities to learn and practice skills, but also the need for teachers to design assignments that their immigrant students can comprehend and complete.

To ensure that newcomer immigrant students understand their homework tasks, teachers may have students start their homework in class, discuss vocabulary in the assignment that could pose difficulties, or have students explain to each other the instructions and the steps to take in completing a given task. By doing so, students would have the chance to ask questions and have help readily accessible from teachers and peers.

In addition, newcomer immigrant students would benefit from attending homework help programs, where they have access to teachers or tutors who can simplify the vocabulary used in assignments and explain the materials targeted in the homework. Results of this study indicated that lack of materials to complete assignments and competing environmental demands (e.g., crowded/noisy family settings, responsibilities beyond those typically expected of adolescents) can hinder homework completion

for immigrant youth. Thus, homework help sessions would ideally be arranged to take place in libraries or classrooms well-equipped with educational resources (e.g. computers with internet access, encyclopedias, periodicals), that can aid students with understanding and mastering new materials. The study findings showed that for some students, resources such as access to the internet is critical for completing homework, and that it can be frustrating to go to the library to find outdated books and long line of people waiting to use the computers. Such impediments can be addressed by reserving certain resources (e.g., quiet space, time, school supplies, and equipments) for use by students to work on their assignments.

Furthermore, homework help programs may serve as a vehicle through which students receive guidance on how to organize their assignments, allocate their time, and manage their study environments. Since a considerable number of participants reported difficulty completing homework due to lack of organization or distractions in their homework environment, teachers and tutors staffing the homework help programs may demonstrate strategies, for example, on how to use an assignment agenda and plan one's homework time. Extracurricular programs that are not focused on academic tasks may also consider including a homework help or tutoring component to their program, especially in light of research evidence indicating improvement in academic performance among immigrant youth who obtained homework help through participation in afterschool activities (e.g., Aspiazu, Bauer, & Spillett, 1998; Cosden et al., 2004; Dotterer et al., 2007; Eccles et al., 2003).

Finally, in order to help immigrant students derive maximal benefits from homework, teachers may reconsider the purposes of homework and the role that homework plays in giving grades. Many participants in the present study indicated grades as an important reason for doing homework, sometimes to the exclusion of other reasons. Emphasizing the effect that homework has on students' grades, or offering extra credit for behaviors such as handing assignments earlier than the deadline can send the wrong message about why homework is given. Since most homework is designed to help students practice their skills, it seems that assessments of homework should primarily be formative, used to shape day-to-day instruction (O'Connor, 2007; William, 2007), and not included in students' grades that indicate their achievement in the course.

Limitations and Future Research

This study was conducted with newcomer immigrant adolescents in one International high school designed specifically to address the educational needs of ELLs. In addition, the homework survey questions were administered only to 9th and 10th graders of the school. Since the study site was a relatively new school (first graduating class was class of 2008), and given the shift in the focus of academic curriculum as students enter 11th and 12th grades (e.g., increased emphasis on Regents examinations, postsecondary education), the findings of the present study are not generalized beyond the study participants. Future studies should be expanded to include immigrant youth in upper grades as well as students in other International schools in New York City to enhance the generalizability of findings and to examine changes in immigrant youth's homework experiences longitudinally, as they advance through the high school grades.

Student samples should also be expanded to include second generation immigrant-origin youth, as well as native-born minority youth who may experience some similar challenges in completing homework as newcomer immigrant youth. Furthermore, a wider range of school contexts should be considered, such as private schools, charter schools, and parochial schools that serve differing densities of ELLs, as well as comparison schools that serve primarily non-ELLs. It will be important to distinguish the homework impediments that are unique to each group of students and determine which homework facilitators have positive effects for whom, under what conditions, and with what support services, in order to implement intervention programs that can best address the needs of specific populations. Evaluation research should also be undertaken to identify the characteristics of programs that produce increased homework completion and academic achievement to explore means of implementation throughout different communities and school contexts.

Subsequent studies should incorporate individual student interviews to gather more detailed information about the processes of newcomer immigrant students' homework completion and the ways in which they cope with specific homework impediments. Although the survey data, supplemented with qualitative data collected through student focus groups, provided some insight into several major factors that help or hinder their homework completion, individual students varied in the range and type of factors influencing their homework experiences (e.g., lack of understanding, responsibilities around the house, fatigue) as well as in their responses to these factors (e.g., seeking help from older siblings, accommodating parents' requests for help instead of completing homework).

Data collected through in-depth interviews and case studies can shed light on patterns or sets of homework facilitators and impediments associated with, for example, newcomer immigrant students with interrupted formal schooling or students from certain language backgrounds. Delineating specific, unique factors that shape different immigrant students' homework experiences would complement the findings of the present study, which focused primarily on the most common or frequently reported impediments. The detailed profiles created through individual interviews can also help school staff identify additional potential factors that may be deterring some students from accessing homework help. Such information would well inform the instructional practices of teachers and schools seeking to tailor assignments / programs to

newcomer youths' diverse individual learning needs and circumstances.

Immigrant families and English language learners are becoming a majority in many communities in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003), and educators have the important role of providing quality education for this rapidly growing segment of the population. Ensuring that homework assignments offer meaningful learning experiences and facilitating newcomer immigrant youth's homework completion is a first step towards academic achievement among these students. Success in school will not only improve the lives of these immigrant youth and their families, but also help to enhance the future economic and social welfare of this country.

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[1] Permission to use the school name was granted by the principal of the school.

[2] Complete survey can be provided by the author upon request.

[3] Data on mother's education were missing for 35 (18%) students; data on father's education were missing for 46 (24%) students. Data on mother's employment were missing for 26 (14%) students; data on father's employment were missing for 35 (18%) students. The percentages reported include these students with missing values.

[4] Complete survey can be provided by the author upon request.

[5] All participants' names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

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APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Welcome & Introduction

Goal of the Focus Group

The purpose of this focus group is to gain a better understanding of how homework affects your lives as immigrant youth living in the U.S. The information you provide will help your teachers design more effective homework assignments and improve the kinds of help that are available to students like you when doing homework.

Explanation of how data will be recorded and used:

We will be discussing your experiences with homework. I would like you to share with the group, talk about how homework affects your daily lives, and what makes doing homework easy or hard. There is no right or wrong answer, and what you share with the group will not impact your grades in any way.

I will be using the data only for my project. Everything we talk about will remain confidential and anonymous, so I will not use any of your names in my project. The discussion will be recorded by a digital recorder, but if during the discussion, there is something you want to share but do not want it to be recorded, you can just ask me to turn the recorder off.

Establish ground rules for focus group discussion:

1. Please turn off any music or communication devices that you may have.
2. Please share your experiences and ideas openly and honestly.
3. Please respect what your peers have to say and allow everyone to take their turn to speak. There should be only one speaker at a time.
4. At times, I will intervene so that we stay focused and to keep the discussion moving.

Focus Group Questions and Discussion

- How do you feel about homework?
  - Why do you think that teachers assign you homework?
  - Do you feel that you have too much homework / too little / just the right amount?
  - Generally, is homework easy / hard for you? What makes homework easy or hard?
- When and where do you usually do your homework? (During school hours? Right after school, at home? At an after-school program or homework center? Morning of the day it is due?)
  - Why do you tend to do homework at that time / place?
- How important is it to you that you have your homework done and handed in on time? *Probe why it is relatively important or unimportant.*
- For you, what are benefits of homework?
- What are the costs / negative effects of homework?
- What are some things that help you get your homework done? (e.g., someone to help with homework, reference resources such as computer with internet access, encyclopedias, tutor, homework center, encouragement from parents and teachers)

Facilitators to Homework Completion (prompts)

Tutors

After-school programs / Homework centers

Reference materials; computer with internet access

Quiet place to study / Set time designated for homework / study

Relieved from household chores / responsibilities to do homework

Rules about homework (e.g., no playing with friends / watching TV, etc. until homework is completed)

Peers who can explain homework problems / who can be counted on to bring you the assignments when you have missed school.

Mentors / non-related adults / role models who provide encouragement and motivation

Parental support (Direct assistance with homework assignments or indirect / emotional assistance

Rewards for homework completion (from parents, teachers)

- How regularly / often do you have these things available to you when you do homework?
- What are some things that make it hard for you to get your homework done? (e.g., not interested in the subject, lack of motivation / self-discipline, lack of quiet place to do homework, responsibilities in the house, part-time jobs,

interruptions from siblings, peers, or family members, limited English, limited understanding of course materials, no one to help with homework)

Impediments to Homework Completion (prompts)

Limited English proficiency

Limited understanding of materials

Overwhelming amount of homework

Not knowing exactly what homework has been assigned

Limited feedback from teacher

Responsibilities around the house

Paid employment

Lack of a quiet, suitable place to study

Limited resources at home (reference materials, computer with internet access)

No one who can help with homework

Lack of motivation / desire to do homework

Procrastination

Fatigue / frustration / impatience

Fear of making mistakes and feeling like a failure

Dissatisfaction with one's work

Forgetting to bring home assignments and necessary materials

Lack of organizational skills and study habits

- Failing to bring assignments back to class
- How regularly / often do these things affect your ability to do homework?
- What are some strategies that you have used to complete your homework?
- What would make you want to do homework?
- What would you like to change about your homework assignments / teachers / parents / environments so that doing homework is easier / more enjoyable for you?

APPENDIX B

Homework Facilitators and Impediments

Which of the things listed below HELP you to do your homework? (check all that apply)
When...

1. I am interested in the subject.

2. I understand what was taught in class.

3. I have clear instructions about what to do.

4. The assignment is explained step by step.

5. I start the homework in class.

6. I go to homework help sessions in the morning or after school.

7. I use reference materials (e.g., dictionary, encyclopedia, Internet).

8. I have a quiet place to do homework.

9. I get rewards from my parents for finishing my homework.

10. I get good grades if I do my homework.

11. My teachers praise me for doing homework.

12. I do not have to do housework.

13. My friends help me with homework.

14. I get instructions in my own language.

15. I can complete the homework in my own language.

16. My parents encourage me.

17. My mentor or another adult encourages me.

Which of the reasons listed below make it HARD for you to do your homework?(check all that apply)

When...

1. I do not understand the lesson.

2. I have too much homework.

3. I do not understand the instructions for the assignment.

4. I don't know what the homework is.

5. I have problems with English.

6. I don't think my teacher will check my homework.

7. I have to do housework.

8. I have a job.

9. There is too much noise in my home.

10. I don't have the things I need to do homework (e.g., books, computer).

11. I don't want to do the homework.

12. I do my homework last-minute.

13. I am too tired to do homework.

14. I am afraid of making mistakes.

15. I am not happy with my work.

16. I forget to bring home the assignment.

17. I am not interested in the subject.

18. I am not organized.

19. I don't review or study what was taught in earlier lessons.

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