

Parents' Choice for Homeschooling in Malaysia: A qualitative approach

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Abstract

Homeschooling, as a new form of education, is currently emerging in Malaysia especially those living the urban cities this trend has been well received in the developed cities especially in the Klang Valley. Homeschooling in Malaysia is a form of alternative education that emphasizes quality education based on moral values and belief in strengthening family ties and also some serve as religious purposes. In this study, the researcher will attempt to explore the influencing factors for parents who choose homeschooling for their children, and other contributing factors involved as well. The proper research questions and research objectives were developed in relevance to this study. A qualitative case study approach was employed to study three families that home school their children. The methodology utilized in this study was a semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted to gather the responses from the parents. The findings of this study indicates Parents choose homeschooling in comparison to the mainstream schooling was due an inadequate curriculum, incompetent teachers, language issues, safety assurance, poor social interactions, school environment and also for religious purposes.

Keywords:

Homeschooling; parent's choice; curriculum; private education; Malaysian learners

Introduction

Home Schooling in general is a program designed for students who wish to pursue their education at home. Homeschooling is an educational practice that is fully supervised by parents at regular schooling and took place on the same day as the public schools (Ebinezar 2008, Ray 2000, Whitehead & Bird 1984). Usually the students need to complete their module before taking their final exam in International Schools or British Counsel. Students who study in the Home Schooling program will undergo IGCSE and O Level rather than PMR and SPM. The home schooling program is cater usually for rich students or expat.

The reasons why parents choose homeschooling instead of the government schools is influenced by factors such as they might be moving to another country soon, they are preparing their child for international education, they prefer small classroom and also their child might be performing poorly in government schools.

In researches related to the homeschooling done since the 1990s till now, the general themes emerged can be classified into five themes, namely factors that answered the question Why homeschooling, student achievement, student competence and social development students with special needs and the legal and policy 'homeschooling' (Norlidah Alias et.al). Other



studies have claimed that that most of the parents believe it is their responsibility to determine the best form of education for their children (Ray 2009). In relevance to this, a research by (Bashan, Merrifield & Hepburn 2007) they found that parents in Canada and the United States preferred to home school their children because they were worried about the moral values and beliefs instilled by traditional schooling.

Research Question

The growing demand for private education for their kids in Malaysia has seen a new shift of parent role in deciding the school choices for their children

1. What are the factors influencing parents to send their child for homeschooling?
2. What are the attitudes and motivation of these parents towards the homeschooling education?

Background of the Study

The growing number of private education choices being presented in the Malaysian community has seen a new trend for parents to be able to choose a certain pathway of education for their children. This has nonetheless have created a demand supply chain reaction in the field of education institution, and since then have created bankable opportunity for those who seek to invest in such areas. One of them is homeschooling, and for the past decade we have seen parents are now opt for such education for their children. In the past, the general assumption was that only those who have the privilege and from a higher income group could afford homeschooling for their children, now we are seeing a new pattern in which parents from all sorts of socio economic background are willing to send their children for

homeschooling. Apart from that homeschooling were used to be associated with religious purposes. The question is why?

Homeschooling in Malaysia

Homeschooling in Malaysia is still in early stages and due to lack of information and knowledge being channeled to the Malaysian parents; it is still being unrecognized as a choice of education for their children. In a study by (Jones & Gloeckner 2004) states that even though homeschooling is well received by the community, it is often disregarded due to lack of research and scholarly attention. In clear context, homeschooling is a choice of education that is fully monitored by the parents at home, whereby the curriculums chosen are either bought from the shelf or can purchase it via online (Ray 2000).

Parents' role

Parents play an important role in deciding what is best for their children, especially in their early ages of a child, not just in terms of providing a sustainable environment for the child to grow, but also a good education. The culture in Malaysia it is unlike in the western countries, whereby parent's choices and decision are important not just in early childhood but also later on as the child grows. Parents in Malaysia are given full authority in deciding what is best for their child, but dues to lack of information they tend to pursue the conventional education. In a study done by (Simon Burgess, Ellen Greaves, Anna Vignoles & Deborah Wilson 2009) states that strong parental demand for academic performance is a key element in the view that strengthening school choice will drive up school performance. In studies related to homeschooling indicates that homeschooled



parents (when compared to public school parents) may have different community and family resources from which to draw in thinking about their involvement in their children's education, including the availability of church support, support groups, and larger family units (Lines 2000, Ray 2000, Van Galen 1988). It is argued that student excellence will not be achieved unless parents are more involved in school programs and activities (Henderson and Mapp, 2000). According to Shaverand and Walls (1998), and Epstein (2001), parental involvement is not only in school but parents should be involved in their children's education at home. . The constant involvement of parents in the home and at school has been linked with children's academic achievement (Christenson et al., 1992; Keith and Lichtman, 1994; Shaverand and Walls, 1998; Izzo et al., 1999; Miedel and Reynolds, 1999).

Although not much research is being done on the comparison of academic achievements of students from home-schooling and public schools, some studies suggests homeschooled students on average do better than public school students (Boulter 1999, Ray 2000). Collom (2013) links the parents motivation in resulting to the growing trend for homeschooling in comparison with formal education, shows the acceptance level and also the perception of the community has improved in years.

Methodology

In this study, a qualitative research method was employed to better understand and capture the essence of the reasons why parents choose homeschooling in comparison to conventional schooling offered by the Malaysia government. In general Qualitative research can be broadly

characterized as the in-depth detailed study of a small number of cases primarily using subjective observational techniques (Ragin 2004, O'Connor 2003). Qualitative research approach is generally employed to describe and answer questions regarding participants and contexts. Qualitative researches are usually interactive in nature and provide in depth information into the respondents' opinions and emotions, which is seen relevant to the current study.

Sampling

Research done by Best (1981) found that the primary purpose of research is to discover principles that have universal application. He also profound that to study a whole population to generalise on a certain aspect would be impractical to achieve. It is known that certain populations are so large that their characteristics cannot be measured, because, before the measurement has been completed, the population would have undergone change in many aspects. In his research Best (1981) describes a "sample" as a small proportion of a population selected for observation and analysis. The researcher can make certain conclusions about the characteristics of the population from which it is drawn, from the characteristics by the sample.

In this study, the researcher used a purposive sampling to obtain findings that will truly fit the Malaysian community. In a related study done by Siegle (1999) states purposive sampling maximizes the chances of obtaining accurate information about the studied phenomenon because it relies on choosing those who both have the experience of the phenomenon and also the ability to communicate their experience of that phenomenon. The major purpose of

purposive sampling is to provide characteristics of a population that are of being focused on, which will enable the researchers to answer your research questions

In this study a total number of three homeschooling parent were chosen to participate in the interview session. All three of them lived in the proximity of Klang Valley and later were interviewed regarding their reasons, concerns, and perspectives of homeschooling choice for their child. The study is accomplished through qualitative study based on in-depth interview of parents' perspectives of homeschooling in Malaysian context with the relevance of the current education policy.

The criterion's used in selecting the parents were as stated below:

- Firstly they need to have different qualification profiles that are with a range of qualifications, educational background, and also their profession.
- Secondly, they needed to have different levels of socioeconomic background, ranging from middle income group, to high income group of parents.
- Finally all of them need to represent a multi ethnicity background to really represent the Malaysian community.

Methods for data interpretation

The Interview session was conducted in a casual nature to best capture the real essence of parent's true intention and their honesty in answering the interview questions. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview transcript to better understand the emerging themes present.

Data analysis

To ensure a 'subjective view' of the matter, the researcher uses the 'general interview guide approach', also known as the semi-structured interview. All interview sessions were tape-recorded, transcribed for thematic analysis and checked for accuracy by a second individual. The data were collected and further analysis was conducted in analyzing the emerging themes or patterns that seem dominant among the learners respond to the questions employed. From the data analysis gathered, the findings suggest that the parents were really aware of the their children education and also the quality of education they received, hence opt for them to homeschool their children.

(*P1- represent parent 1, P2- represent parent2, P3- represent parent 3)

The first research question for this study was to explore on the factors influencing parents to send their child for homeschooling. From the data collected, all three parents agreed that their choice to homeschool their child is the best choice they made and it is beneficial for their future.

P1: one of the main reason I choose to homeschool my son is that I truly believe that he would benefit more being homeschooled as we could spend more quality as a family, and also it would enable me to find the suitable curriculum that fits to his needs..apart from that, being homeschooled gives so much flexibility for us to arrange the learning, and also being as a pararent and educator at the same time in this situation, good time management skills are crucial and ofcourse essential.. I



would suggest that if the parents do not have the time nor the determination, it would be a losing call..

From the above excerpt (P1-Parent 1), mentions on the quality time she is able to spend with her children while homeschooling them at their home. Also she voiced out the concerns of having good time management for any parent to take up such responsibility.

P2: I would say that I choose to homeschool my daughter at an early age is because I don't think her potentials will be fully recognized by the current public schools.. I mean im not against of the public schooling system we have in Malaysia, as I myself grew up in the pubic schools.. Its just in my true honest opinion I think the quality education we give to our kids really plays an important role for the future development as a person. With homeschooling, it gives parents such as me options to choose from a variety of curriculum that would seen beneficial to her later onwards. Apart from that, I think from the past few years we have seen some educational swifts in the medium of the teaching that were carried out abrupt and it left me thinking that my kids future are better of in my own hands, as I think the current educational scene in Malaysia is being politicised for some reasons.

In the following excerpt, (P2-Parent 2) choice to homeschool her daughter was mainly influenced current policy and standards of the public schools. The parent also points out that

the quality of education a child receives is so important and should be given a priority as it would be beneficial as the child grows older. Other concerns also includes on the medium of teaching that is currently being implemented in public schools and also the policy change that has not been successful.

P3: Homeschooling is the best type of education u could give to your children, I mean the exposure to other curriculum has definitely an added advantage for them if they were to pursue their tertiary education in overseas. I would say one of the main reasons influenced me and my wife to opt for homeschooling is that we figured that the language medium of instruction being used in the public schools, not to mention the highly densed pupils in which it would definitely effect the quality of the classroom learning itself. We all know the teachers in public schools are not that concern when it comes the well being of their students, they simply do not have the time to monitor each and everyone of their students, let alone since they have a lot of classes under their supersision. Although I know that being homeschooled would limit my childs social experiences, I think in the long run it is worth the experience.

From the data findings, it can be said that the current education quality being offered by the public schools in Malaysia was one of the factors influencing parents to opt for homeschooling. As the parent (P3-parent 3) mentions above that the language medium being used in public schools and also the high teacher-



student ratio in classroom, is an concerning issue that affects the quality of learning taking place in the classroom.

The second research question in the study aims to investigate on the attitudes & motivation of these parents to send their kids for homeschooling and also what are their view towards homeschooling education in Malaysia. Overall from the interview session with the parents, suggest that their attitudes towards homeschooling is immensely positive although there were some concerns on the implementation of homeschooling particularly in Malaysia.

PI: when it comes to my personal thoughts on homeschooling is that, this type of education is still being overshadowed by the mainstream public schooling system, also there are not many support is being channeled to homeschooling parents from the government or the education ministry.. there is still lack of exposure by the education ministry towards this type of education for children.. I can say that the main problem of this would be that due to lack of information, exposure and also support by the ministry of education results in many parents opting for public schools even when they are still unsatisfied with the public school policy and system, which is stressfull.. under the current ruling for parents to chose a homeschooling education for their children, there are some criteria in which the parents should follow under the ministry..so when it comes to acknowledgement and support by the

government, I think they should be improvised. In comparison, if I may to foreign countries there is not much ruling or specification when it comes to parents choosing homeschooling education for their children, in a way I think the perception towards the homeschooling education should be changed among the society and the ministry should look more into it..

From the excerpt above, the (PI-parent 1) explain that from her point of view is that there is still lack of information being provided to the society on the option of sending your children to homeschool in Malaysia compared to other countries. Also the parent suggested on ways in which the government together with the MOE would provide a better platform for parents in choosing the type of education for their children, as the society perception of homeschooling should change also.

P2: homescholling to me is a best option if you want your kids to be nurtured with life long learning in the comfort of your own home, but ofcourse there are certain challenges to it as well. I would say homeschooling may not be for everyone as it takes a lot of effort and the most important thing is your time. It comes down to how good are you when it comes to deciding whats the best curriculum for your child, understanding their potention and how they are attuned to different aspects of educational field. Homeschooling its not as simple as it seems, there goes a lot of planning and effort to it. Some parents who have nine to five work load and may



have financial problems, it would seem like a huge problem for them as they would simply opt for the public schools as it easy for them in the long run. But in reality for parents who choose homeschooling for their children, there comes a certain satisfaction when knowing your children has better quality education.

P3: my attitudes towards homeschooling has always been singular.. meaning that a lot of effort that put into it will definitely show, and in this case its effects your childrens future upbringing as a whole..not only homeschooling let us spend time as a family more often, it strengthen the bonds with family members to a whole new level.. what else is better than to spend quality time with your kids when they are young.. cause im a firm believer that we must teach and at the same time nurture our children when they are young... past studies have significantly shown that kids are young age learn best and they absorb knowledge at a fast rate in comparison as they get older.. so why wouldn't I take the oppourtunity not only to spend time with my kids but at the same time nurture their potential educational strengths... it is us the parents play an important role when it comes to deciding whats best for their future..

Other emerging themes that were prominent in the findings is the positive connotation that these parents belief towards homeschool education. Also how some of the parents relates to their

mainstream government schooling during their childhood as unpleasant experience due to issues such as lack of school facilities, the inexperience teachers, the medium used in public governed schools and the high ratio of student teacher in the classroom itself.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to explore on the parents role in choosing a homeschool education for their children in Malaysia, which related to parental involvement in education for their children. Interview session was carried with the guideline from the interview protocol in which the questions were constructed according to the construct of interaction and communication, parenting practices, leisure, openness and acceptance and were measured as a key predictor of parental involvement in deciding a homeschool education for their kids. Based on the findings, it was found that although there were mixed perception from parents towards certain aspects, most of them did point of on the similarities when it came to their opinions towards what they think is a better education for their children. It was found that all the parents agreed that home school education is the better choice compared to the normal mainstream government schools in Malaysia.

The findings of this study indicates parents choose homeschooling in comparison to the mainstream schooling was due an inadequate curriculum, incompetent teachers, language issues, safety assurance, poor social interactions, school environment and also for religious purposes. The important point that the researcher would like want to highlight here is that these issues concerning the Malaysian

parents nowadays, can be used to describe in the phenomenon of the rising demands of parents opt to homeschool their children at a very young age. Also there is a need for cultural change towards the negative connotation towards homeschool education in Malaysian society that calls for the transformation of organizational values, norms, structure and processes. Although the data is derived from a very small group of parents in Malaysia and is not applicable to the entire population of parents, it nevertheless corresponds with the parents' choice towards homeschool education in general. Therefore, it is hoped this study will provide some insights about how students go about language learning at the tertiary level.

Limitation

There is also room for further research in this area of study; that is to understand what our current school education system is lacking and also how teachers and educators can arrive at a full understanding of the relationships among language, content, teaching, and context, and how they can implement that knowledge in their disciplinary fields for effective teaching and learning. Finally, future research may investigate how homeschool education is perceived in the Malaysian sociocultural context.

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