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Homeschooling: An alternative to mainstream

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ABSTRACT: Homeschooling is a parent-led home based education, which is currently enjoying new-discovered acceptance both locally and internationally. To understand this new alternative education, we review a number of homeschooling studies from the local and overseas associated with the history and development of homeschooling, factors that led to homeschooling; outcome or impacts of homeschooling on school, families and children, and concerns, challenges as well as critics of homeschooling. We then document the findings of reasons that led to homeschooling and its outcomes to give an overview of homeschooling to provide a guideline and reflection to parents who intend to homeschool their children. Also, it is significant for the current conventional education system to re-attract families who chose home-school as well as to refine the current educational practice to cater the modern generation. Meanwhile, we also document concerns, challenges, and critics towards homeschooling to ameliorate homeschooling as the growing alternative.

Keywords: homeschooling; home education; homeschool; alternative education

1 INTRODUCTION

Homeschooling can be defined with the word “home” and “schooling”, which gives the meaning education or schooling that occurs at home. It is also a circumstance where parents make a conscious decision to provide an education for their child or children in place of that provided by schools, and where the parents are the main teachers or facilitators in the program of education (Broadhurst, 1999). Nevertheless, it is not a replication of school in a home environment, but a holistic lifestyle that strips the trappings of institutional schooling to focus on fundamental (David, 2004). Since homeschooling is a form of private education that is parent led and home based, therefore, homeschooling does not rely on either state-run public schooling or institutional private schooling for a child’s education (Ray, 2013).

Homeschooling is neither a new concept nor practice. Scholars from diverse philosophical traditions have responded displeasure towards formal schooling for a few reasons. For example, John Locke, retained his view on the prime aim of education was a rectitude, and the home of a child was the optimal place to teach them, even John Dewey expressed his contrition about formal schooling (Lines, 2000). The escalation of homeschooling is one of the most noteworthy social movements of

the olden semi century. This reemergence of what is in fact an old practice has occurred for a distinctly modern reason (Lines, 2000). During the late 1960s and 1970s, a movement emerged to turn down the modern change and return to the path where parents were responsible for their children’s education (Aasen, 2010). By the late 1990s, there were over a million students being homeschooled in the United States and the number seems to be growing quickly (Abell, 2002). Just after a decade, an estimated 2.04 million home-educated students (1.73 to 2.35 million) in grades K to 12 resulted in the United States during the spring of 2010 (Ray, 2011). And yet, despite the growth of homeschooling in western countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada and Australia, the increasing movement among Israel, South Africa, and Asia countries, like Malaysia, Taiwan and China is also notable.

In Malaysia, a real figure of homeschooled students does not exist. Thus, we are not sure about the amount of children are being homeschooled and at what rate it is growing. As Reich (2005) reported, in many areas, registration of home-schooled (a necessity to being counted) is not enforced (Murphy, 2014). In other places, homeschool families simply neglect to register when they are required to do so (Lines, 2000). In still other cases, parents are so opposed to government oversight of their

families that they refuse to participate in data collection activities, both census and research efforts (Murphy, 2014). Along these lines, these are probably the reasons counting exact figure of home-schooled students in Malaysia a difficult task. Favorably, academician Ibrahim Ahmad Barjunid once reported that there are about 5,000 home-schooled students in Malaysia (David, 2004). This figure probably takes into account children undergoing religious education in informal groups outside the mainstream, children in special education, students following correspondence or distance learning and also those who are studying in learning centers who called themselves homeschoolers.

Homeschooling is a new form of alternative education in the education system in Malaysia (Norlidah, Mohd, Saedah & Ruslina, 2012). Primary school education became compulsory after the introduction of Free and Compulsory Education Act in the year 2003. According to the provisions of Section 29A, all parents are to ensure that their children at the age of 7 years should be enrolled in a primary school. Nonetheless, the Minister of Education is empowered to grant exemptions and some parents have applied for and obtained approval to homeschool but subject to three conditions: (i) They must use the national curriculum—all other materials are supplementary (ii) They must allow for home visits by Ministry officials (iii) Exemption is for 6 years (David, 2004).

Homeschooling in Malaysia is still at an early stage of development (Norlidah, Mohd, Saedah & Ruslina, 2012). Anyhow, the popularity is growing throughout the years and this form of education is to believe to become the fundamental change of our lifestyle in the postmodern world. Hence, an overview towards homeschooling is significant not only for parents and children who are homeschooling but also the mainstream education.

2 FACTORS LED TO HOMESCHOOLING

Thirty years ago, homeschooling was governed by a allied group of religious fundamentalists and experimental “unschooler”, an assortment of sub-groups is now arise, with different goals that range from nourishing minority identities, to supporting special educational needs, to simply seeking a high-caliber form of education (Aurini & Davies, 2005). According to the figures in National Household Education Survey (NHES) of the United States in year 1996, 1999, and 2003, the three top reasons for homeschooling in 1996 and 1999 are “to give a child better education at home,” “religious reasons,” and “poor learning environment at school,” that includes worries about drugs, peer pressure, and safety. Even the mode changes in 2003, the

three topmost reasons are alike: “concern about the environment of the schools,” “dissatisfaction with academic instruction at the schools,” and “to provide religious or moral instruction,” (Isenberg, 2007). Not to forget, there are also other reasons consisting of a notable number such as physical or mental health, special needs and other behavioral problems.

Several decades ago, the fundamentalists were disillusioned with public schooling as it progressively has no religious or spiritual basis. It is often the case that “these parents view the public schools as grounded in secular humanist philosophy that does not include strong Christian values and dispute moves beyond issues like school prayer and argues that public schools fail to take religious seriously throughout his curriculum (Romanowski, 2006). They do also believe religious duty required them to teach their own children. Consequently, they saw homeschooling appears to be a method to make certain that their children were acquainted to religious teaching. They then sought to integrate religion, learning, and family life by selecting a structured way of homeschooling that concentrated on basics and advocated the dominance of the family. As a result, there is evidence that religious families, particularly evangelical Protestants are significantly more likely to homeschool and therefore results show that religion plays an important role in the decision to homeschool (Isenberg, 2007). Until year 1994–95, the majority of families still named “religion” as the reason why they chose homeschool (Lines, 2000). In Malaysia context as a multireligious country, it is certain that there are families settled on homeschooling with religious reasons.

The ascend of Neo-Liberal ideology, and the manner of public debate on education is increasingly permeated with suspicion of efficiency, liability, and options are factors prompted the growth of homeschooling. A plurality of families say they are turning to homeschooling because they are dissatisfied with the quality of the public school, the public school instructional program and the public school environment, mainly safety, drugs, and unfavorable peer pressure (Lines, 2000). In addition, Broadhurst (1999) stated reasons for choosing homeschool include dissatisfaction with curriculum content, perceived ineffectiveness of schools, and concerns about adverse socialization as a result of school attendance, bullying, and regimentation of school. Parents also believe that whatever public schools teach, they teach ineptly and wanted to share a respect for their children’s intellect and creativity and a belief that children learn best when pedagogy taps into the child’s innate desire to learn (Romanowski, 2006). Likewise in Israel, Neuman & Aviram (2003) found general

public dissatisfaction with the education system and a search for alternatives is the conditions taken place in the homeschool movement. Similarly, the primary motivation for homeschooling in China is parents' response to their dissatisfaction to the current educational system, especially exam-oriented system resulted in long-time study at school and overloaded homework after school, from which students suffering physically and psychologically (Zhao & Badzis, 2014). Ebinezar (2008) who conducted a qualitative study of five Malaysian families who homeschooled their children found that parents choose to homeschool due to the content of the public school curriculum is not convincing enough.

Simultaneously, John Holt, an American author, educator and also a proponent of homeschooling or unschooling believed that the best learning takes place without entrenched curriculum, and the child should go after his own interests with the help and inspiration of parents and other adults (Lines, 2000). He gave support to small sects of parents to educate their children by their own effort and convinced that public school, as bureaucratic organizations, only harm children by subjecting them to the inhumane routines of "technocracy", unschoolers chose a radically unstructured version of homeschooling that aimed to cultivate children's personal enjoyment of life (Aurini & Davies, 2005). Apart from that, John Dewey also held that school had been artificially "set apart" from society, and had become "so isolated from the ordinary conditions and motives of life" that it was "the one place in the world where it is most burdensome to get experience," (Lines, 2000). He also perceived that parents are insightful enough to identify what is the greatest for their child, and capable to provide what is required.

In view of the fact that public school is no longer the ideal place for learning, parents tend to seek for betterment. According to Romanowski (2006), families choose to homeschool their children because they intent to build up their relationships with their children. These parents have either experienced personally or have witnessed children suffering both emotionally and academically because of the schools' limitation, and recognized "that the schools are often reluctant or unable to serve children with unique learning styles or academic needs". This initiates them to consider "breaking the traditional formal model of teaching will enhanced understanding and learning in their children". In other respects, Ray (2011) marked a number of additional reasons parents look for children's betterment. First, parents want their children to achieve more academically than they would in school. Applied to this, parents wish to individualize the curriculum and learning environment that

meets their child's special needs and talent. Third, they hope to foster relationships of the family among siblings and parents. Fourth, they want to come up with guided and reasoned social interactions with peers and adults rather than having the school to determine. Finally, the safety of their children. Similarly, as the new economy is raising credential requirements and intensifying labor market competitions, parents pursue homeschooling by expect superior skills needed in educational and occupational contests to reduce uncertainties in the future as well as to attain advantage in status competitions (Aurini & Davies, 2005). Thus, mothers with more time and less income or even better educated mothers are more likely to homeschool their children especially the young ones and older children with behavioral and special need (Isenberg, 2007). David (2004) a Malaysian parent who homeschooled their children chosen homeschool because they wanted to give their children their childhood, he wanted them to have hobbies, space to grow, time to reflect and most importantly a lifestyle that builds values that matter in their children while they are still with them.

3 OUTCOMES OF HOMESCHOOLING

3.1 *Impact on schools*

As homeschooling created a dramatic movement in education field, one of the promising effects of it could be its influence in forming the public education. Particulars from the homeschooling movement offer important perception about both the restoration of the public education system and the rectification of individual schools (Murphy, 2014). Analysts expect possible effect in public school in the range of areas involving the human resources, curriculum, resources, institutional structure, and etc. Three avenues which homeschool could shape public school: (1) withdrawal impacts, (2) lighthouse effects, and (3) competitive effects (Murphy, 2014). Withdrawal impacts result in a reduced allegiance, willingness to support taxes which leads to less financial aid as well as material resources reduction for public schools. Further, lighthouse effects advocate that the collective goodness that causes homeschooling effective will discover its way in public education (Ray, 2013). Lastly, proof exist that competition from homeschooling is reassuring public schools to develop new institutional appearance. The notable development is the creation of new schools that permit homeschooler to complete their education in multiple setting, both at home and in public school (Bauman 2002). Isenberg (2007) also found part-time homeschooling consist a number in the whole.

3.2 *Impacts on families*

Since promoting family bonding is one of the reasons parents choose homeschooling, it is also the impact on family. (1) averts the generational gap between children and parents; (2) builds good relationships among siblings; and (3) establishes a nurturing family atmosphere, for example allow families to knit a strong bond and lead to successful marriages (Murphy, 2014). On the negative side of the ledger, first, homeschooling requires a dominant commitment of time (Aurini and Davies, 2005) and hard work. Second, homeschooling often requires a lifestyle decision to be made where primarily the mother has to forego her earnings to stay at home (Lubienski, 2003). Third, homeschooling confine the careers of the mothers who stay at home (Aurini and Davies, 2005). Last, frustration arises in homeschooling where it is a difficult task to balance homemaking and home teaching (Murphy, 2014). Despite of that, homeschooling do grant satisfaction when seeing children develop, occupying time with children, deepening sibling relation, as well as enliven full-time motherhood. Additionally, Neuman & Aviram (2008) claimed homeschooling is perceived as a solution to difficulties of three types—the parents' negative experiences as children (both in school and in the family framework), negative family and marital experiences, and the children's negative experiences in school. They also asserted the choice of homeschooling affects areas of family life beyond education (e.g. medicine or health, family relationships, work, self-fulfillment), and needs different practical and ideological preparation than those needed for conventional education.

3.3 *Impacts on children*

First thing when we come across impacts of homeschooling on children we will definitely reflect the academic achievement. According to the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) of the United States, which collects nationwide research results, the average homeschooler consistently scores higher on standardized achievement tests compared to average public school students, with median scores from 15–30 percentile points higher than the public school norms (Aasen, 2010). Ray in his subsequent investigations (1997, 2010) reinforced that homeschooled children attained at or above 80th percentile in all subjects on standardized tests. Although, analysts find that homeschool students who sit for the standardized test generally do quite well when compared to conventional peers, there is a caveat in the academic achievement aspects added by Murphy (2014). Three concerns come into view.

First, analysts from the homeschooling community firmly reject the concept of the priority of achievement scores in comprehending the impact of homeschooling. It is opined that other more significant goals like instilling values should centered in the investigation of whether homeschool works. Second, homeschooling is a right that surpasses test results and the gate to homeschooling should not open or shut in response to test scores. Lastly, the focus on achievement results placed the burden of evidence for the validity of homeschooling on homeschooler, rather than those who against the implementation.

In all likelihood, the most vastly held misconception of homeschooling is the myth of socialization (Romanowski, 2006). Medlin (2013) indicated that the socialization experiences homeschooled children gain are more than adequate. In fact, indicators like quality of friendships along childhood, rarity of behavior problems during adolescence, acceptance to new experiences in college, civic involvement in adulthood conveyed that the socialization experiences homeschooled children receive may be more advantageous compared to children who attend conventional schools. Moreover, when claims pointed that homeschooling creates children who are unable to think for themselves, one study suggested that socialization in conventional schools may not be as empowering as many suppose that they found 84% of the teachers' message reflected the teachers' effort to quiet the students, keep them from asking questions without recognition, or to direct their straying attention to the task at hand (Medlin, 2013). For that reason, homeschool parents are mindful of the issue of socialization and strongly devoted to positive socialization chances for their children. For instance, homeschooled children are involved in various activities outside the home range from scouting, dance classes, group sports and volunteer work with peers, children of varying age, and adults. Hence, they are not isolated from the outside world. Romanowski (2006) also claimed schools are not the only place children learn basic life skills and because homeschooled students are not peer-grouped in school, they learn to interact and deal with variety of people, making them socially mature and able to adjust to new situations.

Another effect of homeschooling on children that gives great concern from the parents will always be the post-homeschooling effects. Broadhurst (1999) stated that children who have been home-educated have successfully applied to and been allowed entrance into prestigious universities, noteworthy that one family from the United States educated their four sons outside the school system, and the three oldest successfully applied to attend Harvard University. Further, homeschooled students also

rate their entire college and university educational experience more positively and adjusted quite well to the tertiary education environment compared to students who were never homeschooled (Drenovsky & Cohen, 2012). Set side by side with the positive university enrollment of homeschooled children, public schooling has been criticized for leaving many children behind while instilling a hidden curriculum of sightless obedience to authority. Besides, there appeared to be no prejudice exhibited towards home-educated teenagers and adults when they attempted to obtain employment and also given allowance to pursue a wide variety of options post-homeschooling (Broadhurst, 1999). They also expressed satisfaction towards their job, family's financial status and life (Murphy, 2014). Therewithal, homeschool graduates have an impact in their communities as they are almost twice as likely to participate in community service and also more likely to belong to community or professional organization (Aasen, 2010; Murphy, 2014). Likewise, a study shows 53% of those in the West believing homeschooling promotes good citizenship as compared to 37% of those in the East (Lyons & Gordon, 2002).

4 CONCERNS, CHALLENGES AND CRITICS TOWARDS HOMESCHOOLING

Since education is privatized by the family, it is difficult to ensure that proficient instruction is provided and student is well engaged in their learning. Most of the parents attend their bachelor degrees from different fields other than education, though they choose homeschooling out of various reasons, they are still freshmen in this new field (Zhao, Badzis, 2014). Some parents do confessed that they are not confident about their method of teaching and children sometimes displayed a need for better quality tuition due to parents' careless handling of learning content. Meanwhile, concerns of homeschooling sometimes feature the lack of educational resources available to parents. But homeschooling associations support advice and information, held conferences on legal, philosophical, and pedagogical controversy, and review educational materials at exhibition booths (Lines, 2000). Aurini and Davies (2005) also reported that given the widespread diffusion of internet, home computers, educational materials, support groups and perhaps most important, the largest cohort of university-educated parents world history.

On top of that another major concern is that homeschooled children lack the opportunities to interact and socialize with their peers. Even though numerous studies revealed that homeschooled children have done remarkably well socially,

psychologically, and emotionally, all these studies might have used the qualitative research method that generalized the result. Schalkwyk & Bouwer (2011) in their qualitative study of the voices of homeschooled learners found that in order for homeschooled children to make parents happy as they deserve of respect for their sacrifices, children managed to display adequate impulse control on a behavioral level. They are lonely and helpless and admitted that they are too close to their mother and recounted effort to gain some distance, however, they still tried very hard to identify with the principles set by their parents but did not fully succeed in doing so and showed strong desire to articulate their own needs and realize their own interest. In short, no matter the discourse, it should be fundamentally questioned whether the developmental needs of any child may be disregarded when whatever form of education or curriculum is considered (Schalkwyk & Bouwer, 2011).

In the sense of challenges in homeschooling, parents expressed their loneliness upon embarking on the journey while most of their extended families do not understand and support their ideas (Zhao, Badzis, 2014). David (2004) also stated, Malaysia, a society where we live does not take kindly to people with a different point of view and deeply ingrained with the "normal" way. The biggest challenge is to assuage the suspicion of their friends and the authorities in power. Besides, Zhao & Badzis (2014) also declared the challenges in homeschooling practices in China can be concluded in one key word—balance, in two perspectives. The first balance is the one between homeschooling child and other social responsibility upon parents, a full-time mother and a full-time teacher. The second balance is teaching balance among subjects, where parents from the social science background are not confident to teach pure science subjects.

Lubienski (2003) asserted that even though Universal Declaration of Human Rights outlined parents have a "prior" right to decide on the type of education to be provided for their children, but it is not absolute. When a child must take on the repercussion of another individual's (the parent's) poor choice, then it is fair to call for external intervention. Indeed, Ray (2013) also criticized home education makes children and youth susceptible to, or victim of, bad home environment, bad parents, child neglect, child abuse, child labor abuse, and problematic family and social issues. Thus, he suggested home-based education must be under considerable state control for several reasons such as (a) balancing state and parental rights over the education and upbringing of children; (b) balancing the rights of the state, parents, and children in children's upbringing; and (c) properly recognizing that children cannot get or achieve certain good things under the upbringing of

their parents and that they can only be assured of getting under the rearing of institutional schools, especially state-run ones, or nurture of the state.

Yet, proof that some (or even all) students schooled at home perform better than school-educated students does not indicate that the application of homeschooling result in improvements in academic achievement. In fact, we might note that home schooled students have background elements that differ from those of the typical public school student. Background elements related to academic success include higher family income levels, higher levels of parental educational attainment, more stable families with higher rates of employment (father), and higher rates of a parent (mother) at home (Lubienski, 2003). With family quality as such, it is probable that these children would outperform in school setting too. In addition, it is important to know that the families made a choice that reflects a serious interest in the education of their children and they also have resources not only of time and means, but also the initiative, to make that choice. Therefore, it generally gives impact to a student's academic success (Lubienski, 2003).

Howell (2013) noted that opponents of home-based education do not advocate it because they want the state to be in predominant and ultimate control over the education and upbringing of all children as future adult citizens. They are worry that homeschooling is affecting children to become adults who detain worldviews, think and believe different than they (the opponents) and different from what they want to promote to children and society through state-controlled education. Also, the common school experience is essential for the development and maintenance of the public good and exit from public schooling is an attack on public monopoly (Murphy, 2014). In like manner, Ray (2013) indicated parent-led home-based education harms the collective good; it is bad for the common good or society as a whole because homeschooling is fear based and anti-based (e.g., afraid of different kind of people, anti-state, anti-common sense, and anti-selflessness) as well as cocoons children and parents from those in society who are different from them.

5 CONCLUSION

Homeschooling is an educational application that is entirely supervised by parents. It is also an option to the mainstream that has risen notably in the past half century not only in the developed western countries but also developing countries like Malaysia. Although homeschooling in Malaysia is still in the early stage of development

(Norlidah, Mohd, Saedah & Ruslina, 2012), but it is undeniable that it is becoming more common and more widely accepted. Eventually, it will become a major alternative to the mainstream education. Families all over the world from diverse background settle to homeschooling for several reasons: (1) religious reasons, (2) poor learning environment at school and (3) to give a child better education at home. As the outcome of homeschooling, it gives impacts on school, family, and children. Three avenues which homeschool could shape public school: (1) withdrawal impacts, (2) lighthouse effects, and (3) competitive effects (Murphy, 2014). Impacts on families divides into both positive (promote family bonding, solution to difficulties) and negative (commitment of time, scarification of the mother). Meanwhile, impacts on children comprise of academic achievements, socialization, and post-homeschooling effects. On top of all these, we also analyzed concerns, challenges, and critics of homeschooling. The communities and even parents itself they are concern about the proficiency of instructions given and also the socialization opportunities of homeschoolers. At the same time, parents who chose homeschooling faces challenges like to assuage the suspicion of others and balance the role as a parent and a teacher. On the other side, opponents of homeschooling do criticized choice of schooling is not only the parental right, but also the state's academic achievement of homeschoolers are not absolute high as well as homeschooling is bad for common good.

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