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ARTICLE



Homeschooling in Singaporean Chinese families: beyond pedagogues and ideologues

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ABSTRACT

Despite the achievement of the Singapore education system as one of the top performers in international achievement tests, there remains a group of parents who choose to homeschool their children. While this number is increasing, there is a lack of studies conducted in Singapore on why parents decide to homeschool their children. Thus, this study seeks to explore the relevance of home pedagogy by examining the reasons why parents choose homeschooling. Using a qualitative methodology, 10 homeschooling families were interviewed about their motivations for homeschooling. The results of this investigation revealed that parents were motivated by pedagogical and ideological reasons. These include a preference for individualized instruction, a dissatisfaction with an exam-oriented education system, and parents' religious orientation and beliefs about bilingualism. This study concludes with the observation that parents who favor homeschooling view education as a lifelong process rather than as a set of content to be mastered.

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Introduction

The Singapore education system has consistently been ranked as one of the top performers in international assessment achievement tests such as TIMSS, PIRLS, and PISA. The latest TIMSS 2015 results ranked Singapore first for mathematics and science achievement among fourth and eighth graders (Mullis et al. 2016), while the PIRLS 2011 results ranked Singapore fourth for literacy achievement among fourth graders (Mullis et al. 2012). Yet some children are not attending school due to their parents' choice of providing an alternative education through homeschooling. This study will begin by outlining the macro context in which homeschooling takes place and then explores the reasons for the parents' choice of an alternative education through focusing on the views of homeschooling parents in Singapore.

Homeschooling on the rise

Homeschooling is an alternative to mainstream education, with parents performing the functions of teachers and the home as the pedagogical site. A rising trend is observed in countries such as the USA (Planty et al. 2009), Canada (Arai 2000; Brabant, Bourdon, and Jutras 2003), South Africa (Brynard 2007), Australia (Barratt-Peacock 2003), and New Zealand

(Varnham 2008) and is gaining much attention in the academic field. According to the US Department of Education, National Education of Statistics (Gray 2018), 1.7 million students were homeschooled across the country in 2012. Over an eight-year period (2003 to 2012), there was an increase of 61.8% in students being homeschooled. Homeschooling families surveyed in 2007 (Bielick 2008) cited reasons such as parents' keenness to provide their children with religious and moral education, concerns about the school system that exposes students to drugs, negative peer influence, and danger, and dissatisfaction with academic instruction to justify why they considered homeschooling a good substitute for formal schooling. In many countries, parents who choose to homeschool their children must obtain permission from the education authorities (Blok and Karsten 2011; Davies 2015). Critics who oppose homeschooling questioned the lack of socialization with peers. Arguing for the importance of school as a social institution, Reich (2002) purported that homeschooling children do not have the opportunity to receive exposure to the diverse range of people, ideas, and materials which public school students usually have access to. In dealing with others, public school children develop social skills such as respect, self-control and cooperation. In a similar vein, Lubieniski (2000) criticized homeschooling parents for withdrawing their children from public school, thus preventing public education from serving an important group of citizens in the society. Homeschooling has also been branded as "elitist" and a threat to universal schooling (Meisels 2004). Yet more and more families are opting to withdraw their children from public school, hence there is reason to be concerned about how this rising trend may shape the educational landscape which could impact educational policy and practice. Thus, by investigating homeschooling, we stand to gain a broader picture of how homeschooling as a set of social practices is carried out and what implications this provides with regard to public education and educational policy.

Homeschooling in Singapore

Compulsory education act in Singapore

The national education system in Singapore is shaped by a meritocratic framework that pushes students to compete in schools (S. Lim, Wong, and Tan 2013). Under the Compulsory Education Act implemented in 2003, a 6-year primary school education is compulsory. Singaporean children begin formal schooling in Primary One when 7 years old and learn basic numeracy and literacy skills which are then incrementally developed as they progress to a higher grade. At the end of the sixth year, they have to sit for a national examination, the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). While the Compulsory Education Act states that a child must attend a national primary school for at least six years, three categories of children are exempted: those attending designated schools, e.g. the six madrasahs, which offer Muslim religious education, and the San Yu Adventist school, a private Christian school that follows the Ministry of Education (MOE) curriculum; homeschoolers; and special education children (Ministry of Education 2012).

Homeschooling regulations in Singapore

Parents who homeschool their children must seek permission and provide the MOE with their course materials and syllabus. In addition, like all other Primary Six students, the exempted students (except Special Needs) must take the PSLE test but they are judged

against a higher benchmark as they have to meet the 33rd percentile aggregate score of mainstream students. This benchmark was set for San Yu Adventist School and home-schoolers “by taking into account the profile of the pupils who wish to be exempted from compulsory education” (Tan and Lim 2008). According to Lee (2016), the MOE prefers children to attend mainstream school and justifies the higher benchmark as a way to ensure “homeschool children meet certain educational standards so as to safeguard the educational interests of the child” (p. 2). Thus, if the children do not meet the MOE benchmark, they are required to enroll in mainstream schools.

The MOE regulates homeschooling by making the PSLE compulsory in four subjects (English, Mother Tongue, Mathematics and Science). In addition, homeschoolers must pass the National Education Quiz where students are tested on their knowledge on issues such as the nation’s history and maintaining unity among the ethnic groups. Beyond this, MOE does not interfere in the choice of curriculum and does not stipulate the teaching methods or types of assessment administered by the parents. However, parents are required to submit a report of homeschoolers’ test scores in the four subjects once a year. In 2014, the MOE added another regulation for Primary 4 home-schoolers to take an assessment conducted by them which was justified as part of the monitoring process to ensure that the children are receiving an appropriate education. After PSLE, parents can freely choose any international certification and diploma for their children to pursue.

Singapore has a bilingual policy where English is the official working language and each ethnic group speaks their mother tongue. As this policy filters down to schools, the medium of instruction in Singapore schools is English and only the mother tongue language is used during Mother Tongue classes. Chinese is designated as the mother tongue for ethnic Chinese Singaporeans. The language status assigned to English is higher than Mother Tongue languages and this has resulted in a language shift in families. In many Singaporean Chinese families, English is the language most frequently used at home (Ng 2011). This has raised some concerns among several researchers. Goh (2009) predicts that “this generation of Chinese Singaporeans will stop speaking Chinese language in their daily lives, and Mandarin will subsequently become a language studied only in classrooms (175).” Lee (2012) attributes the beginning of this shift to the “one-master language policy” created in 1987 where “policy-makers in Singapore decided it was generally not possible for a person to be equally fluent in two languages... that most people can have only one master language (p.289).” Thus, English was designated as the medium of instruction in schools and Chinese became taught as a subject in the language class. She believes that if Mandarin had been used as a medium of instruction on par with English, students would be more bilingual today. While this policy filters down to public schools, it is not compulsory for homeschooling families and they have the flexibility of using any language as a medium of instruction.

Prevalence of homeschooling in Singapore

As the MOE does not publish the official figures of homeschooling children, there is no indication of the prevalence of homeschooling in Singapore. It was not until the implementation of the Compulsory Education Act in 2003 that it became known that 280 primary school pupils were being homeschooled (Tan 2010). Unofficial figures came mostly from newspaper

sources. According to Ho (2008), the number of seven-year-olds being homeschooled rose from 30 in 2003 to 60 in 2008. More recent figures provided by Teng (2014) estimated the total at around 500 since 2003. However, it is not clear if special needs children are included in these figures. In order to obtain more reliable figures, the PSLE release of results press releases were used to obtain some approximate figures (Hong 2013). The MOE publishes the number of students registered and sat for PSLE annually in their press releases. Table 1 presents an organization of the figures from 2008 to 2016. The first year in which the first group of exempted homeschoolers who sat for PSLE was 2008 as they were required to register for exemptions in 2003 when the Compulsory Education Act was implemented. In 2003, 31 students applied for exemptions and six years later, 26 students sat for PSLE. The 5 who did not sit for PSLE could have been exempted due to medical reasons.

From Table 1, within a nine year period from 2008 when the first group of exempted homeschoolers was required to sit for PSLE, there were almost 300 children who have been homeschooled. This seems to indicate a rising number since 2008 when it was first reported that there were only 60 homeschooled children.

The profile of homeschoolers

As the MOE does not provide the profile of existing homeschoolers, these can only be peered from a few academic works (Lim 2009; Hong 2013) and mostly from newspaper articles published from 2008 to 2016 (Ho 2008; Lee 2016; Leow 2010; Ng 2007; Teng 2014). From such sources, it appears that homeschooling families are generally one-income families where mothers are mostly the ones staying home to homeschool the children. Such mothers typically have a good level of education, and are very often active Christians.

Motivations behind homeschooling

Modern homeschooling in the US began as a movement in the 1970s through the efforts of groups of advocates. One group was the religious and conservative Protestant parents who believed that public schools were eroding the religious values of the children. The other group was the counter-cultural activists who objected to how public schools were catering to a mass audience, producing children each similar to one another as they had to conform to using the same textbooks, prepare for the same state and national test. To them, public schools were not helping the children develop

Table 1. Number of homeschoolers who registered and sat for PSLE .

Year in which home-schoolers registered	Number of homeschoolers in each cohort who registered	Year in which home-schoolers sat for PSLE	Number of homeschoolers in each cohort who sat for PSLE
2011	37	2016	37
2010	33	2015	33
2009	41	2014	41
2008	33	2013	33
2007	37	2012	37
2006	32	2011	31
2005	31	2010	26
2004	44	2009	37
2003	31	2008	26
Total	319		301

their full potential (Carper and Hunt 2007; Gaither 2009). Van Galen (1988), who conducted a field research of 16 homeschooling families, termed these two groups as “ideologues” and “pedagogues” respectively.

Ideologues vs. pedagogues

One of the earliest research projects on homeschooling was carried out to establish parental motivations. A common first question which many observers may ask homeschooling parents is “Why” do they do it when the country has invested large amount of funding in public schools and there is availability of private schools. Van Galen (1988) used the terms pedagogues and ideologues to describe parental motivations. Ideologues were motivated by religious reasons to teach moral values and desired to strengthen parent-child bond. Pedagogues were more concerned about the social and academic climate of the school and believed that they were better able than schools to provide their children with positive learning experiences at home.

This conceptual framework was used in subsequent studies to establish parental motivations. Mayberry and Knowles (1989) used the pedagogue and ideologue dichotomy framework to further categorize parental motivations into four groups. Parents with ideological orientations were distinguished between the religiously motivated from those who desire a “New Age” lifestyle. Parents with pedagogical orientations were divided into two groups: those concerned with academic success and those concerned about the quality of sociorelational development in schools. In a longitudinal study conducted by Hanna (2012) on 250 families and spanning a range of 10 years from 1998 to 2008, she found that families’ motivations did not differ over the decade. Parents in her study were asked to identify their motivations based on Van Galen’s profile if they were ideologues, pedagogues or a combination. In 1998, 56% identified themselves as ideologues, 22% as pedagogues, and 20% chose a combination. In 2008, the results differed little. 46.8% identified themselves as ideologues, 24.6% as pedagogues and 26.4% a combination. She observed that some parents began the schooling process motivated by their religion but it later became a pedagogical one.

Arai (2000) compared the motivations of Canadian homeschooling families with US families and found that Canadian parents’ motivation to homeschool were not distinctly divided into pedagogues and ideologues, rather they demonstrated a mixture of both reasons. Some parents that she interviewed had positive views of teachers and formal schooling. Although all the parents were religiously devoted, religion was not a major motivational factor. He attributed this to the homeschooling phenomenon attracting more families who view it as an alternative to formal schooling and not “as a radical alternative to contemporary public schooling” (p.214).

Elsewhere in Australia, Barratt-Peacock (2003) provided the reasons that parents opted for home schooling due to the different values that conflict with those from the schools. While schools promoted competition, these parents prefer cooperation, while schools develop conformity, parents’ desire individuality. Unlike the homeschooling parents in US where religious conviction was one of the motivations, this was not mentioned in the study.

While many homeschooling studies have been conducted in the US since 1919 (Kunzman 2009), these were conducted in monolingual families, and very little is known about homeschooling in bilingual families. Hence, Singapore is an appropriate site for

studying this phenomenon due to its Bilingual policy. Homeschooling is a growing but under-researched area in Singapore. Most information about homeschooling is anecdotal, coming mostly from newspaper articles (Ho 2008; Lee 2016; Leow 2010; Ng 2007; Teng 2014) and homeschooling websites (Maniam-Ng 2008; Suwei 2011).

A literature review discovered one published work and a few unpublished dissertations. One of the scholarly works on this topic was published by Lim (2009) who provided a general description of the homeschooling phenomenon in Singapore. The four mothers interviewed in this study explained what spurred them to homeschool their children. They were highly critical of the structural issues affecting public education and in particular of the fixed rigid curriculum set by the MOE, the high teacher-to-student ratio in classrooms, and negative peer pressure present in formal schooling. Lim's participants were highly critical of the education system for the lack of financial support such that the homeschooling families have to bear the entire educational costs. In another study located in Singapore, Hong (2013) investigated eleven homeschooling families from middle and upper socio-economic status (SES) and found four reasons why parents chose to homeschool their children. Moral, intellectual, social-emotional and spiritual developments were the reasons that motivated the parents to choose homeschooling, with moral development as the top reason. These parents also voiced their unhappiness on being unfairly treated by the MOE. For example, they felt that imposing a higher benchmark on the PSLE scores for homeschooling children was unfair and educational funds and resources allocated to public school students were not accessible for homeschooling children. However, from 2014, the MOE has extended the EduSave pupils fund to children not studying in the mainstream schools. This fund is given to students between the age of 6 and 16 and consists of \$200 for primary-level students and \$240 for secondary-level students per year. Thus, like public school children, homeschoolers can now tap into this fund to pay for their enrichment programmes.

Similar to previous studies conducted in the US, Canada and Australia, both studies revealed a mix of pedagogical and ideological reasons present in parents' motivation in choosing homeschooling. As seen, parental motivations are myriad and complex. Van Galen's (1988) framework of identifying parental motivations is insufficient in capturing the complex and dynamic homeschool landscape. While previous research has focused on why parents homeschool, little attention has been given to the interconnectedness of pedagogical and ideological motivations and how it connects within a structured education system. As education plays a significant part in child development, the Ecological Systems Theory of Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979) is useful in explaining parental motivations and the influences behind them because homeschooling parents are mostly involved in social, cultural, educational, and religious activities.

Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979) stressed the importance of human development in the ecological environment using a nested structure that contains four levels of interrelated systems that emphasize interaction and interconnectedness: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. Based on this framework, in the present study, the microsystems consist of the family and the homeschool. The next layer is the mesosystem, which consists of the relations between two microsystems such as home and school with the microsystems interacting. However, in the homeschooling context, the two microsystems (family and school) overlap to make this level almost indiscernible. The exosystem consists of the larger society in which the child does not directly interact, yet is

influenced nonetheless through the microsystem. In this study, one influence on this system is the impact of educational and language policy on the child. As discussed earlier, every child in the Singapore education system has to take the PSLE. However, the assessment yardstick for homeschooling children is higher than for those in public schools. In addition, the Mother Tongue is a compulsory subject assessed in the PSLE. These subsystems might influence parental decisions in educating their children. Finally, shared cultural values and belief systems within the society form the macrosystem. As Singapore is a multi-racial society that is rooted in the Confucian model which emphasizes an examination-oriented system, the ideologies in the system indirectly influence the child through his or her parents' ideologies. For example, the cultural norm of prioritizing examinations in a child's education could affect parents' choice of an alternative education. In Singapore, homeschooling is legal for homeschooling but parents are held responsible by the MOE in preparing their children for the national examination.

As the numbers of homeschooling families have increased since Lim's (2009) and Hong's (2013) study and with changes in policy such as additional regulations and financial support from the MOE, it is timely to extend this study to include more parents so as to gain a more current and accurate perspective from the parents. Much of the published literature has informed us of homeschooling parents' motivations in countries where the language, culture, homeschooling policy and educational expectations are different from Asian families. Hence, this study seeks to examine the perspectives of homeschooling parents in Singapore by investigating the reasons which motivate them to choose homeschooling as an alternative education for their children.

Method

A qualitative research methodology was adopted in this study. As this research targets homeschooling families, a qualitative paradigm was deemed the most appropriate methodology for this study. It allowed the researcher to develop an in-depth understanding of the homeschooling families by examining the meanings and interpretations they bring with them through their experiences. To understand social practices is to examine the social interactions expressed in daily life. By interacting with the participants, the researcher attempted "to make sense of, or interpret phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 3)". Thus, emic knowledge (insider knowledge) constructed from the personal account and experiences of the homeschooling families bundled with their thoughts and emotions may yield a holistic and inclusive description of the life of these families. In addition, the phenomenological nature of qualitative inquiry describes and interprets everyday life from a bottom-up approach. The strength of qualitative inquiry lies in producing descriptions that are rich in details which represent the voices of the individuals who participate in the study.

Participants

The data I present in this paper are excerpted from the results of a wider study on homeschooling in Singapore conducted from October 2013 to July 2014. Ten homeschooling mothers participated, each with at least one child of primary school age being homeschooled. The mothers were recruited through the method of snowball sampling

Table 2. Interviewees' profiles.

No	Mother's name	Level of Education	Religion	No of children	Father's occupation
1.	Patricia	Bachelor of Engineering	Christianity	3	Engineer
2.	Brenda	GCE "A" levels	Christianity	2 (Son is a special need student).	Engineer
3.	Min Fong	Bachelor of Arts	Christianity	3	IT programmer
4.	Doreen	Bachelor of Arts	Christianity	4	Teacher
5.	Li Hao	Bachelor of Arts	Christianity	2	Instructor
6.	Hannah	Bachelor of Arts	Christianity	3	Lecturer
7.	Sally		Christianity	2	Physiotherapist
8.	Ee Ping	Bachelor of Engineering	Christianity	3	Photography
9.	Alice	Bachelor of Arts	Christianity	3	Businessman
10.	Gladys	GCE "A" levels	Christianity	2	Tennis coach

which uses an initial contact to generate more contacts. Initially, the researcher had known only one mother and through her she helped to make contact with two more mothers who make contacts with more families. This generated a total of 17 families. Of the 17 families which the researcher had approached, 10 families of Chinese ethnicity participated. The fathers in the families were asked to participate in the interviews which they declined. Thus, all the participants were mothers who stayed at home with the children while the fathers worked. All the participants are assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. Table 2 presents the participants' profile.

As seen from Table 2, all the parents were ethnic Chinese and have the same religious belief which is Christianity. On the whole, they are a highly educated group with 8 out of ten attaining a university degree. The fathers' occupations were largely professional taking on white-collar jobs. Because mothers are usually the teacher and the caretaker, all the participants turned out to be the mothers.

Research process

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with the 10 families. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted about an hour on average. Some of the interviews were conducted in the homes but the majority were conducted in cafes.

According to Creswell (2003), interviews are useful for research questions that seek to understand participants' beliefs, attitudes and experiences. Thus, interviewing the home-schooling mothers allowed the researcher to understand their thoughts and ideas about their own homeschooling experiences and their perspective the children's educational development.

Using specifically prepared questions together with open-ended questions (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009), the interviews were conducted like conversational dialogues rather than one-way dialogues such as a question-and answer session. The interview questions served as a guide to the interview process and were designed to be broad so as to encourage the participants to talk and share as much as possible (Seidman 1998). Some questions were revised or abandoned depending on the directional flow of the conversation. By engaging them freely in conversation, the researcher was able to establish a cordial and comfortable relationship with each participant (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009) and gather more accurate details of the homeschooling experience.

Table 3. Interview data.

Codes	Mother's name	Duration of interview	No of utterances
[T1_Pat]	Patricia	114 minutes	1046
[T2_Brenda]	Brenda	75 minutes	681
[T3_MF]	Min Fong	62 minutes	572
[T4_Doreen]	Doreen	54 minutes	495
[T5_LH]	Li Hao	76 minutes	689
[T6_Hannah]	Hannah	91 minutes	830
[T7_Sally]	Sally	112 minutes	1018
[T8_EP]	Ee Ping	51 minutes	462
[T9_Alice]	Alice	81 minutes	742
[T10_Gladys]	Gladys	78 minutes	711
	Total	794 minutes (13 hours 23 minutes)	7246

Data analysis

Data analysis was performed in several phases, and the iterative process involved was transcribing, sorting data, coding and interpreting. The accounts provided by the participants are viewed as a source of information about the events they participate in, and it could also reveal “the perspectives and discursive practices of those who produced them (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, 120).” Thus, the interviews were first transcribed.

The sorting phase consists of organising and categorising all the data. As the amount of text generated from the ten transcripts was enormous, the first step towards analysis was “winnowing” that is to reduce them to “what is of most significance and interest (Seidman 1998, 117).” For all the interview transcripts, each was read through thoroughly to determine the number of utterances and the total number was recorded. An utterance is a message unit and could consist of a word, phrase, sentence or several sentences that represent a single meaning. Once all the utterances in the transcripts were determined, the interview data was organised according to the number of total utterances. Table 3 presents the number of utterances in each transcript and the total number of utterance count for the ten interviews.

The third phase, coding, was performed inductively to allow the themes to emerge from the data. In looking for patterns and themes, codes at the first level were identified by forming categories from the sources of data collected. These codes were then collapsed into broad themes by looking for linkages in the data (LeCompte and Schensul 2010).

Out of the 7246 utterances, each utterance was labelled and categorised. Next to the utterances, descriptors using key words or phrases were written that categorized sections of the data at the margins. Table 4 presents an example of the coding process.

As patterns emerged, they were clustered together using the same descriptor. Utterances with the same category were grouped and listed together. During this process, data that seem significant to how they are related to the research question were organized together. After organizing the utterances under the same label, broader themes were used to group all the utterances together. Throughout the analysis in the final phase, new categories were added and refined as they emerged from the data. The categories were tabulated according to the number of utterances and arranged according to the highest frequency count. Out of the 7246 utterances, there were 102 where parents articulated their motivation in homeschooling. This will be presented in the next section.

Table 4. Coding of data.

Utterances	Descriptor
1. Hannah: And my Bible teaching will be in Chinese because we attend a Mandarin church...Mandarin congregation.	Religion and language
2. Sally: So I mean, the initial motivation was that we want our children to eh, build a strong Christian foundation and a critical worldview in a sense that... and a customised curriculum to develop their own interest and that flexibility. So those were the main reasons and the reason why they are not in sec school despite their program being so attractive and the rigor is there	Religion and motivation

Results

Motivations for homeschooling

Table 5 presents the total number of utterances categorized under parents' motivations. The homeschooling parents in this study were explicit in conveying their motivations towards homeschooling. When the parents were asked why they chose to homeschool their children despite Singapore having well-established academic institutions, they responded with a mix of pedagogical and ideological reasons.

These findings corroborate with the works of homeschooling research around the world (Barratt-Peacock 2003; Christian 2010; Isenberg 2007; Van Galen 1988). Thus the reasons why this group of parents chose homeschooling as an alternative educational option were:

- to provide a customized learning environment;
- to avoid exposing the children to excessive testing and assessment in the schools;
- to instill religious and moral values; and
- to promote bilingualism

These reasons will be discussed in turn in the following section.

Customized learning is advantageous

Practical issues of pedagogy were most frequently mentioned by parents as one of the reasons for choosing homeschooling. Parents believed in the benefits of an individualized, differentiated learning approach that caters to the needs and interests of the child. They recognized that each child is different and that homeschooling provides the flexibility of curriculum choice for developing a child-centered pedagogy that accommodates the child's personality and pace of learning. They believed that each child is different in potential and therefore a one-size-fits-all approach in curriculum and instruction will not work. One mother, Ee Peng, initially sent her son to childcare but his kinesthetic learning style did not fit in with

Table 5. A tabulation of the utterances.

Reasons	Percentage of utterances per domain	No of utterances per motivation
• Customized learning is advantageous	30.4	31
• Transmission of religious and moral values	30.4	31
• Exam is a vehement monster	28.4	29
• Promotion of bilingualism	10.8	11
Total	100%	102

the learning centre's pedagogical goals as he could not keep up with the pace of the lessons and was always singled out by the teachers for being inattentive. She often received calls from the teachers who complained about her son's behavior. As a result, she decided to home-school her children. She expressed her reason for homeschooling as follows:

For us, we appreciate the fact that the kids can learn at their own pace, on some days, they can just go slow if they want to, in some areas we are also willing to bear with them and go slow with them. In the normal school setting, the teachers will be calling me every day. [T8_EP]

Gladys valued the unique personalities and learning styles of her children and did not think that a one-size-fits-all school system could accommodate her children's learning style. As she remarked:

So basically I would think that homeschooling is... it is no one-size-fits all... that's why we don't send them to school because of that so homeschooling can take on any form you want and to me it's the whole beauty of it. [T10_Gladys]

Alice echoed this view as follows:

So I think that when you homeschool, it's not a one-size-fits all unlike the schools. There are just so many kids that you can't cater to everybody... at the same time. [T9_Alice]

Religious ideology

The homeschooling parents were highly committed to transmitting their family and religious values which consists of spiritual, moral and character development. One mother, Sally, chose to homeschool her children for religious reasons, not because she disliked the public school system. On the contrary, she had a high regard for local schools and admitted that she was attracted to the programs offered by these Singapore schools such as robotics, research internships, and community services. She and her husband were high achievers at school, and their school experiences contributed to their positive perceptions of schools. But she chose to homeschool her children because of her Christian beliefs and the flexibility to customize the curriculum. Her two children were also high achievers who attained high PSLE scores and were offered places in the top cohort schools. However, she rejected these offers. She explained her reasons as follows:

So I mean, the initial motivation was that we want our children to eh, build a strong Christian foundation and a critical worldview in a sense... and a customized curriculum to develop their own interest and flexibility. So those were the main reasons and the reason why they are not in schools despite their program being so attractive and the rigor is there. [T7_Sally]

Li Hao wanted to instill moral and Christian values so that her children will grow up with the right values and not be confused by undesirable "world values". She gave her reasons as follows:

The value of homeschooling...which I saw, which is, to have your child with you for character development, spiritual development, having them away from... all the bad influence... of schools... having strong family relationships... so what we try to do- is to inoculate ... er, that means give them... wholesome things, so that they know what is good, then introduce a little bit of the world a bit at a time. [T5_LH]

Another mother, Doreen, shared a similar view:

Mm... it's because of our Christian belief. Yeah, we believe that the influence of the world is very strong, and they're at a very... tender young age... And uh...that they're not ready to... to face the challenge...Yeah we...we felt that we should keep them with us...to... instil Christian values, like what the... Bible says, so that when they come to a certain age they can ... embrace it...or at least it's part of them, cos you keep doing it...then...when they are ready then we'll send them back to the world, and let them stand uh, for the Lord...So that's why we choose to... home school our children. [T4_Doreen]

Research has documented that parents play an influential role in shaping children's early adoption of religious traits (Hayes and Pittelkow 1993; Myers 1996). Parents in this study saw the importance of transmitting religious values and attitudes to the next generation when they are still young as they believed that this religious capital can keep them grounded when they face the harsh elements of the world.

This motivation is commonly seen in evangelical homeschooling families worldwide where homeschooling is seen as "a God-given task and the transmission of their belief as the foremost educational goal" (Spiegler 2015, 157). Contrary to general perceptions that parents choose homeschooling as a reaction against public schools' inability to educate their children (Green and Hoover-Dempsey 2007), these parents are not negative towards the public school system but chose homeschooling because they believe that it is their personal responsibility to transmit moral and religious values to their children.

Exams as a "vehement monster"

Another pedagogical reason for homeschooling mentioned by parents is dissatisfaction with the overuse of testing and assessment prevalent in the Singapore school system. The parents were not against the system of public schools nor did they regard the school system as being inferior to homeschooling. Rather it is the system of assessment and testing the parents rejected due to the unnecessary pressure it places onto the children's learning journey. Min Fong, a former teacher with MOE, shared her own experience of teaching students solely to prepare them for the PSLE and school examinations. She did not want her child to spend the last two years of her primary school days being drilled in PSLE exam skills. She explained her reason for choosing homeschooling as follows:

Homeschooling gives me more time with them... more involvement in their lives, in their roles, in their learning, and then I also want to give them more... variety rather than just studying which is very repetitive, because...a large part of the school is uh... geared towards exams. Always they will... every year they will have exams methods, before that there will be a... lot of time spent drilling for the exams, and er... ya, then the child... has not much time, after school, and then especially when you get to Primary 4, it's really just exams, ya. [T3_MF]

Brenda described the school as a "vehement monster" that subjects the students to unnecessary pressure from testing. She disagreed with how schools test the amount of information stored through rote learning which took the attention away from acquiring knowledge. She said:

If I had... if I can say something to the Minister of Education, I would say that, you know, erm, don't... put these children to unnecessary pressure, you know, uh, if you have to... teach...test them, don't test them based on the very basic knowledge of twelve years old,

not... uhm, the...the level where you put so much pressure on them...that they cannot learn anything apart from the content. [T2_Brenda]

Parents believe that there is more to examination and grades in a child's education. Patricia, for example, felt rewarded when her child demonstrated compassion and moral character which are outcomes that are not assessable by grades:

So... you know...I... I think... you know... he has compassion for people who are blind, who are sick, who are... who are hurting...I... I feel that that is... that is...something that is priceless right, something that... that blessed my heart a lot already, and this is something that... I can't write it out in paper writing and say... I score A for this, I score B for this, you know, I can't. So the learning... learning process, I believe is every day, I grab hold of... whatever moment that God put into my life, that... I used that as a teaching moment. [T1_Pat]

Alice referred to the education system as "a rat race" and expressed relief that she could allow her son to learn at his own pace. She described her pedagogy of teaching reading as follows:

We kinda read every day to the kids...we love reading...ya, I read to them, cos sometimes boys being boys, their... I think language skills wise, they pick up... a bit slower. I have to respect that also, and then go slow, and then you can't push...can't push it. I din...din... didn't know and I pushed it, then I realized that the child just...it just backfired, it just backfired and then the child just say, next time I don't want to do it anymore. Ya so...we don't want to... create a fear of learning things...so if you don't know the word now, but... few years later you will know it, ya.We're not... we're not competing with everyone... we're out of the rat race already,why... why bother? [T9_Alice]

Assessments and national examinations are key features of the Singapore education system. By choosing homeschooling, the parents are voicing their rejection of the culturally dominant mode of assessment. Quantifiable results are not the intended educational outcome that these parents were seeking. Instead they were aiming for an education that imparts values as well as knowledge. They were confident that they are able to monitor their children's learning as their close proximity and bond did not necessitate constant testing. This is expressed by Ee Ping:

Homeschooling allows us to go at our own pace, that's one and we also appreciate the fact that it is better for us to be with them to guide them...in behavior and character building. For my husband, I ever asked him, "If I homeschool him till Primary 6, what if our kids don't do well in PSLE?" He answered "It doesn't really matter, we know our kids...better". The school system focusses on exams and he is also more concerned about the character development in the children rather than scoring well.[T8_EP]

The educational backgrounds of these parents drew similarities to parents documented in previous studies (Arai 2000; Hanna 2012; Brabant, Bourdon, and Jutras 2003). Parents' view their children as individuals and themselves as competent teachers. These highly educated parents are confident that they are able to educate their children well. However, this small group of parents is not representative of the majority of families in Singapore and it is unlikely to attract a significant number of families to adopt homeschooling.

Promotion of bilingualism

All ten parents replied affirmatively when they were asked if they supported bilingualism and the Singapore Bilingual Policy. However, the degree of bilingualism practiced in each family differs in levels of commitment and enthusiasm. Seven mothers used English as a medium of instruction at home while one used Chinese and two used a mixture of both. Out of the ten families, four families indicated the benefits of using a flexible medium of instruction in homeschooling. The educational philosophy held by such homeschooling parents is linked to their language ideologies concerning bilingual development. In terms of language teaching, all ten mothers teach their children English and Chinese languages on their own at home. In addition to home instruction, Ee Ping and Sally saw a need to provide additional enrichment lessons for their children and enrolled their children in Chinese languages classes conducted by commercial language centres. Since English and Chinese as a Mother Tongue are two compulsory and examinable subjects in the PSLE examination, they are planned into the families' homeschooling curriculum which also included Math, Science, Arts, Music, and Bible reading.

When parents talked about the importance of learning Chinese, they were quick to associate the symbolic value linked to their ethnic identity. Despite the efforts of the Singapore government to propagate bilingualism in the Chinese community through policies and campaigns, proficiency and usage is not on par with those for English (Lee 2012). The homeschooling mothers face the same challenge of promoting bilingualism. The pervasiveness of English usage in Singapore and many children's dislike for the Mother Tongue language worried the homeschooling parents because they believe that Chinese should be taught in order for the children to identify with their ethnicity and not become detached from it. While these parents feel the resistance against learning Chinese in their children, they were not prepared to yield to their children's attitude of dislike. Instead, they all expressed the same view that despite the children's attitude of dislike for the Chinese language, they were more determined to teach the language well because they must retain their Chinese identity and remind the children of the need to remain rooted to their cultural heritage. Thus, five mothers enforced a family language policy of using English and Chinese at home. These mothers explained their language practices to illustrate their bilingual ideology.

Patricia spoke Chinese to her children during informal instructions while her husband spoke English to the children. Their grandparents spoke Chinese to the children. She explained her family language policy as follows:

Currently, we do four days of homeschooling only... Monday, Wednesday are Chinese days, so... we speak in Chinese,... sing in Chinese, talk in Chinese er... read in Chinese... teach in Chinese... ya... that day I will not know any English. I will tell the kids, I don't know English, you... you have to speak... so that's the way how I... I sort of en... en enforce... enforce... uhm, the... the Mandarin speaking at home. Then... er... Tues... Tuesday and Thursday are English days. [T1_Pat]

Another mother promoted bilingualism by using teaching materials in both languages. To overcome her children's alienation towards Chinese, she used English materials to engage her children so meaning could be understood before exposing them to the Chinese version. In this way, she found that her daughter was able to acquire key vocabulary in Chinese:

So since English is easier... Chinese is a bit harder so... for Chinese I do a lot of media, Eng... English media is available in Chinese also... I noticed that for their favorite shows, they will watch them over and over again, ah... so i will tell them, "Okay, you watch in English already right, now you watch in Chinese." It helps because they already know them, so when they are watching the whole thing in Chinese again... they actually, they will actually... understand, like, 感冒 (gan mao/**a flu**) means a flu, and if she doesn't know she will say it out, "Mama what is this?" Usually I... hang around, like I'm ironing, I'm watching, I will still shout out, "Oh that is... a flu!" [T3_MF]

Parents also linked bilingualism to their religious ideology. Sally saw bilingualism as a mediation tool for the communication of religious messages. She emphasized that bilingualism was not viewed as a tool for gaining economic benefits only but also a tool for communicating religious messages. Thus, Sally saw the importance of having two languages so that her children could act as translators and be competent to communicate with both Chinese and non-Chinese interlocutors. For her, global mobility would require bilingualism for communication, and bilingual speakers are strategically placed to play the language mediator role between the Chinese and English speakers. She expressed her views as follows:

So now my thinking is... the most important thing is... erm... you need another language for communication, after all it's all about communication. I mean it's not about whether you can get a job, whether you can go to China and work and all that. For me it's not an economic reason although that's a valid reason, but for my own family right, the most important is that if you ever get called to share the gospel and that's my end goal... is to get them to be fluent in Chinese, fluent enough to go on a mission trip and act as a translator to a Caucasian person. Some American organizations come and they can be that bridge from east to west. Aah, I'll be very happy! [T7_Sally]

While the medium of instructions in mainstream schools are compartmentalized into English and Mother Tongue, homeschooling affords the space for bilingual teaching and learning to develop seamlessly in flexible, authentic and enjoyable ways as practiced by these homeschooling mothers.

Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this research was to investigate the motivations of homeschooling parents in Singapore. As the number of homeschooling children is increasing in Singapore, it is timely to understand the perspectives of homeschooling families. The results of this study indicate the parents are socio-economically stable and have relatively high levels of educational attainment with the mothers staying home to teach the children. At the microsystem level, both pedagogical and ideological motivations play a big part in their decision to homeschool their children. The one-size-fits-all education model and the schools' obsessions with assessment and examinations are major reasons for their decision to homeschool. Homeschooling allows parents to customize their pedagogy and personalize the learning process which is academically and developmentally beneficial for the child. This form of pedagogy is organized around the individual child, unlike school systems that are generally prescriptive and organized around groups (Loh 2010). In addition, some parents also hold ideological reasons where they want to be responsible in educating the child to ensure that their children are taught the beliefs and

values that they hold. Such parents may be concerned about their children's cultural identity, or wish to promote bilingualism through using a bilingual medium of instruction. In so doing, they want their children to be proficient in their Mother Tongue and not to forget their Singaporean Chinese identity. It can be seen that the Singapore Bilingual Policy has exerted some degree of influence at the exosystem level which will indirectly influence the child's language acquisition and development.

These motivations reflect parents' educational philosophy in ensuring that their children receive the best education they could provide. They were less pragmatic in viewing education as the route to a successful career. Embedded within the core values of Singaporean Chinese culture is a common ideology that everything else is secondary to the pursuit of good academic grades. In many Confucian Asian societies such as Singapore, parents view academic achievement as a primary path to success and place high expectations in scoring good grades in tests and examinations (Frewen et al. 2015; Tan and Yates 2011). However, these parents do not view education as a set of content or skills to be mastered but as a lifelong process of learning not confined to the classroom. This shows that the macrosystem has little influence on parents' decision to homeschool as they have chosen not to conform to societal norms. In many cases, their desire is to lay a strong foundation of Christian morals and values that will support their children as they go through the challenges and complexities of life.

The findings in this study also bring to light the fact that homeschooling families are not mainly motivated by their religious convictions but they have pedagogical concerns as well. This is similarly observed in Arai's (2000) and Barratt-Peacock's (2003) study participants where religion is not the most important factor in making educational choices even though it plays a central role in the family's spiritual life. While Lim's participants were highly critical of the Singapore education system, the parents in this study respected it for carving and developing strong academic programmes and effective curricula. Many of the families are using the local curricula in their homeschooling lessons. They do not see themselves competing with the educational system, but rather they see the responsibility of educating and raising their children as a fulfillment to the Biblical calling of being responsible parents. Hence, homeschooling adds more diversity to the education system in Singapore and families can benefit from having more choices in educating their children. However, this model of education may not be suitable for all families, e.g. single-income families.

These findings corroborate earlier research that suggested that parents homeschool for a wide range of reasons some pedagogical and ideological (Barratt-Peacock 2003; Christian 2010; Isenberg 2007; Van Galen 1988). No one family is the same. One parental motivation not mentioned in previous study was the desire to promote bilingualism for Chinese language maintenance which represents a unique Singaporean perspective on homeschooling.

This study is limited in several ways. Firstly, the number of participants was small and shared many similar background traits such as religion, educational level, and ethnicity group which limit its applicability. Future studies could examine homeschooling families with different religions or none, and different ethnicities so that comparisons could be made between different cultural variables. Furthermore, this study focused on mothers. In future studies, the fathers and children could be interviewed for a more complete and balance view of why families choose homeschooling. In addition, this study could be extended to include the developing child's agency and experiences on homeschooling so as to provide more understanding of the homeschool learners' perspectives.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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