

5th World Conference on Educational Sciences - WCES 2013

Public understanding about homeschooling: A preliminary study

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Abstract

Homeschooling is becoming a popular alternative education to school-based education. This study aimed to determine 130 Turkish participants' understanding about homeschooling through the survey which was developed based on previous studies. In the study, descriptive statistics and chi-square were used for data analyses. Several factors appear to drive participants' reactions to homeschooling, most notably having a gender-related and socio-economic orientation. If the factors that influence participants to choose homeschooling or schooling can be identified accurately, then it may be possible to use such an alternative model and regulate home school admission policies and curriculum accordingly.

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Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of Academic World Education and Research Center.

Keywords: Homeschooling, public understanding, Turkish educational system, alternative education

1. Introduction

The term “homeschooling” is used with reference to parents who teach their children at home. Homeschooling is often compared with school-based education, the institution of teaching children at school. Homeschooling and school-based education can be seen as two extremes of a continuum. In an intermediate form, children would be taught in part by their parents, in part at school (Blok, 2004). It can be seen as a temporary or permanent alternative to education which is provided by the state or by private schooling (Petrie, 1993). Over the past decade, homeschooling has gained considerable ground in the United States and European countries. In a study of legislation concerning home education in Western European countries, Petrie (1995) found countries that

- accommodate home educators and always have done so (Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, most of Switzerland, United Kingdom).
- have not permitted home education sometime in the past, but now do so (Austria).
- now no longer permit home education in the word of the law but would appear to permit individual instances (Spain, Greece, two Swiss cantons, the Netherlands, Germany).

In the United States, by 1993, homeschooling had been legalized in all 50 states under pressure from homeschooling organizations (Bauman, 2001). The exact numbers of home educators in each country are difficult to come by for a variety of reasons. In some countries, children who have never been to school are not required to register with the authorities. Even where it is difficult to home educate, as in Germany, children are educated at home, but parents often do not make themselves known to others. Not all families belong to home educating support

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groups (Taylor & Petrie, 2011). In the United States, recent estimates put the home school population between 1.2 million and 1.6 million and it is growing at the rate of 10% per year. Home-educated children make up about 1.5% of total school enrollment and 15% of nonpublic enrollment. Some researchers feel the home school population will reach 3 million by the end of this decade (Houston & Toma, 2003).

Although homeschooling is a growing phenomenon in many Western countries, it is almost non-existent in Turkey. Under Turkish educational law, children must be educated in the school system. Firstly, homeschooling was opened to discussion by the Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in 2005. Afterwards, this term was discussed by some educators, institutions and media. Homeschooling is thought to endanger children's development by some authorities. Today, homeschooling is practically non-existent in Turkey. This paper provides an overview of homeschooling and describes a survey of public understanding about homeschooling. The overview discusses public perceptions towards homeschooling, curriculum, socialization issues, support groups, concerns for education and learning opportunities, and advantages and disadvantages of schooling at home for future educational policies and arrangements in education.

2. Method

This study was designed to find out why people decide to homeschool and to designate if such determinants as gender and socio-economic status could explain their decision on homeschooling. A survey method, quantitative research method, was adopted in this study.

2.1. Research group

Although the data of the study were obtained from 130 participants in a metropolitan area, participants involved in this preliminary study were from different age groups, gender, educational level and socio-economic backgrounds. Of the 130 participants, there were 82 (63%) females and 47 (36%) males, spanning the age range from 19 years to 75 years ($M = 34.65$). The vast majority of participants were college or university graduates ($n=46$). They were followed by postgraduate participants ($n=30$), graduates of high school ($n=22$), and graduates of elementary school ($n=9$). There were also elementary school dropouts ($n=11$), literate but have never been to school ($n=8$) and illiterate ($n=4$), respectively. Over half of the participants (49%) were married with children ($n=63$). Among the remaining, 53 (41%) were single without children, 10 (8%) were married without children and 4 (3%) were single with children. As for the socio-economic backgrounds of participants, a majority of them ($n=59$, 45%) were on the starvation line with monthly income of 1011" and below. They were followed by participants ($n=41$, 32%) with monthly income of 1011" and 3179". Participants with monthly income of 3179" and above constituted 23% ($n=30$) of the research group. Although participants of the study are currently living in a metropolitan area, 22% ($n=29$) of them were born and brought up in villages. The remaining participants were born and brought up in metropolitan areas ($n=27$, 21%), counties ($n=23$, 18%), cities ($n=21$, 16%), and towns ($n=4$, 3%) respectively.

2.2. Instrument development and data analysis

The survey used in this study was developed by the researchers depending on previous studies (Bielick, Chandler, & Broughman, 2001; Grubb, 1998; Lines, 2000). The adapted survey was examined by two experts specialized in Educational Sciences and a language expert. It was also piloted with participants from different age groups, gender, educational level and socio-economic backgrounds. The revised survey finally covered the following issues: demographic characteristics, religious reasons, lack of trust in public schools, provision of safe environment for children, education and learning opportunities, control over curriculum, and types of educational and financial support. Descriptive statistics and chi-square were used for data analyses.

3. Results

Following the survey of public understanding about homeschooling, the collected data were analyzed based on the basis of gender and socio-economic status. Results were presented through tables to visualize findings better.

3.1. Reasons by gender

As seen from Table 1, more than half of the participants reported socialization opportunities (57.7%) and face to face interaction with teachers (56.2%) at school as a reason for school-based education. Also, different education opportunities were reported as the third reason for school-based education (50%) by the half of the participants. Most of the participants who were not sure whether to opt for homeschooling or not (23.1) had concerns about providing as sufficient socialization opportunities as provided at school. As for the participants who were in favor of homeschooling, a majority of them stated that they would prefer homeschooling due to better character/morality development at home (47.6%), poor learning environment at school (40%), and standardized individuals brought up at school (38.5%).

Regarding gender preferences, Table 1 demonstrates that male participants in the group who were not sure about homeschooling (n=8, 17%) indicated more concerns for socio-political conditions in the future than female participants. Among the participants who would choose homeschooling for their children, males specified “religious reasons (48.9%)”, “family reasons (44.7%)”, “to develop character/mortality (59.6%)”, and “child has special needs/disability (23.4%)” as the reasons for homeschooling more than female participants. On the other hand, the items “ignorance of individual differences” and “could not get into desired school (13.4)” were selected by female participants more than male participants.

Table 1. Chi-square analysis of gender preferences*

	Items	Female f (%)	Male f (%)	X ²	p**	Total f (%)
Reasons for school-based education	Socialization opportunities at school	49 (59.8)	26 (55.3)	.242	.623	75 (57.7)
	Different education opportunities	41 (50)	24 (51.1)	.014	.907	65 (50)
	Face to face interaction with teachers	48 (58.5)	25 (3.2)	.347	.556	73 (56.2)
	Parent career	23 (28)	18 (38.3)	1.447	.229	41 (31.5)
	Lack of time for child's education	30 (36.6)	21 (44.7)	.819	.365	51 (39.2)
	Lack of knowledge on curricula	33 (40.2)	24 (51.1)	1.418	.234	57 (43.8)
	Lack of theoretical and practical scientific knowledge	40 (48.8)	23 (48.9)	.00	.986	63 (48.4)
	Other	11 (13.4)	2 (4.3)	2.766	.096	13 (10)
Reasons for NOT SURE	Concerns for socio-political conditions in the future	5 (6.1)	8 (17)	3.934	.047	13 (10)
	Concerns for special needs of child	6 (7.3)	5 (10.6)	.422	.516	11 (8.4)
	Concerns for the quality of educational technology at home	4 (4.9)	5 (10.6)	1.527	.216	9 (6.9)
	Socialization opportunities at school	11 (13.4)	19 (19.1)	.750	.387	30 (23.1)
	Other	1 (1.2)	1 (2.1)	.161	.688	2 (1.5)
	Can give child better education at home	13 (15.9)	8 (17)	.030	.863	21 (16.2)
	Religious reasons	17 (20.7)	23 (48.9)	11.109	.001	40 (30.7)
	Poor learning environment at school	31 (37.8)	21 (44.7)	.587	.444	52 (40)
Reasons for homeschooling	Family reasons	18 (22)	21 (44.7)	7.318	.007	39 (30)
	To develop character/morality	34 (41.5)	28 (59.6)	3.926	.048	62 (47.6)
	Object to what school teaches	21 (25.6)	12 (25.5)	.00	.992	33 (25.3)
	To bring up standardized individuals at school	31 (37.8)	19 (40.4)	.086	.769	50 (38.5)
	School does not challenge child	12 (14.6)	8 (17)	.130	.718	29 (22.3)
	Other problem with available schools	20 (24.4)	7 (14.9)	1.628	.202	27 (20.7)
	Student behavior problems at school	21 (25.6)	7 (14.9)	2.019	.155	28 (21.5)
	Child has special needs/disability	35 (2.7)	11 (23.4)	4.840	.028	46 (35.3)
	Ignorance of individual differences	37 (45.1)	7 (14.9)	12.147	.000	44 (33.8)
	Transportation problems	26 (1.7)	21 (44.7)	2.171	.141	47 (36.2)
	Child not old/mature enough to enter school	15 (8.3)	3 (6.4)	3.529	.060	18 (13.8)

Want private school but cannot afford it	13 (15.9)	3 (6.4)	2.466	.116	16	(12.3)
Parents' career	7 (8.5)	3 (6.4)	.194	.660	10	(7.6)
Could not get into desired school	11 (13.4)	1 (2.1)	4.511	.034	12	(9.2)
Other	3 (3.7)	0 (0)	1.760	.185	3	(2.3)

*There are missing data ** P<0.05

3.2. Reasons by socio-economic status

Table 2 displays that there is a significant difference between socio-economic levels. The item “lack of theoretical and practical scientific knowledge” was reported by 61% of the starvation line group as a reason for public school preference. Two reasons for homeschooling including “family reasons (45.8%)” and “transportation problems (49.2%)” were selected by the starvation group more than other socio-economic groups. Socio-economic group with middle or higher income stated the items “ignorance of individual differences (46.7%)”, “child has special needs/disability (60%)” and “school does not challenge the child (30%)” as reasons for homeschooling more than the other groups. Other reasons (7.3%) such as “school limits children creativity and freedom”, “standards and quality of schools vary depending on the location” were indicated only by poverty line group for homeschooling.

Table 2. Reasons and chi-square analysis of socio-economic level*

	Items	starvation line		poverty line		middle or higher		X ²	p	Total
		f	(%)	f	(%)	f	(%)			f (%)
Reasons for school-based education	Socialization opportunities at school	33	(55.9)	23	(56.1)	20	(66.7)	1.081	.582	73(56.2)
	Different education opportunities	29	(49.2)	22	(53.7)	15	(50)	.206	.902	66(50.7)
	Face to face interaction with teachers	36	(61)	21	(51.2)	17	(56.7)	.948	.623	74(56.9)
	Parent career	18	(30.5)	16	(39)	7	(23.3)	2.029	.363	41(31.5)
	Lack of time for child's education	24	(40.7)	19	(46.3)	8	(26.7)	2.908	.234	51(39.2)
	Lack of knowledge on curricula	32	(54.2)	16	(39)	10	(33.3)	4.275	.118	58(44.6)
	Lack of theoretical and practical scientific knowledge	36	(61)	17	(41.5)	11	(36.7)	6.146	.046	64(49.2)
	Other	5	(8.5)	6	(14.6)	2	(6.7)	1.501	.472	13(10)
Reasons for NOT SURE	Concerns for socio-political conditions in the future	7	(11.9)	5	(12.2)	1	(3.3)	1.929	.381	13(10)
	Concerns for special needs of child	4	(6.8)	6	(14.6)	1	(3.3)	3.251	1.97	11(8.4)
	Concerns for the quality of educational technology at home	4	(6.8)	3	(7.3)	2	(6.7)	.015	.993	9 (6.9)
	Socialization opportunities at school	9	(15.3)	7	(17.1)	4	(13.3)	.188	.910	20(15.3)
	Other	0	(0)	1	(2.4)	1	(3.3)	1.779	.411	2 (1.5)
Reasons for homeschooling	Can give child better education at home	6	(10.2)	10	(24.4)	5	(16.7)	3.619	.164	21(16.2)
	Religious reasons	24	(40.7)	12	(29.3)	5	(16.7)	5.453	.065	41(31.5)
	Poor learning environment at school	19	(32.2)	19	(46.3)	15	(50)	3.378	.185	53(40.8)
	Family reasons	27	(45.8)	9	(22)	4	(13.3)	12.005	.002	40(30.8)
	To develop character/morality	28	(47.5)	23	(56.1)	11	(36.7)	2.624	.269	62(47.7)
	Object to what school teaches	11	(18.6)	15	(36.6)	8	(26.7)	4.037	.133	34(26.2)
	To bring up standardized individuals at school	18	(30.5)	17	(41.5)	15	(50)	3.420	.181	50(38.5)
	School does not challenge child	5	(8.5)	6	(14.6)	9	(30)	7.105	.029	20(15.3)
	Other problem with available schools	7	(11.9)	11	(26.8)	9	(30)	5.311	.070	27(20.8)
	Student behavior problems at school	9	(15.3)	8	(19.5)	11	(36.7)	5.541	.063	28(21.6)
	Child has special needs/disability	17	(28.8)	11	(26.8)	18	(60)	10.377	.006	46(35.3)
	Ignorance of individual differences	13	(22)	17	(41.5)	14	(46.7)	6.941	.031	44(33.8)

Transportation problems	29	(49.2)	10	(24.4)	8	(26.7)	7.947	.019	47(36.2)
Child not old/mature enough to enter school	10	(16.9)	4	(9.8)	4	(13.3)	1.058	.589	18(13.9)
Want private school but cannot afford it	8	(13.6)	3	(7.3)	5	(16.7)	1.560	.458	16(12.3)
Parents' career	2	(3.4)	5	(12.2)	3	(10)	2.934	.231	10 (7.6)
Could not get into desired school	2	(3.4)	5	(12.2)	5	(16.7)	4.812	.090	12 (9.2)
Other	0	(0)	3	(7.3)	0	(0)	6.666	.036	3 (2.3)

*There are missing data ** P<0.05

3.3. Support for homeschooling

The following two tables show support type for participants who would require when they homeschool with regard to gender and socio-economic status. While only one item “place for students to meet (58.5%)” was reported by female participants as a support for homeschooling more than male participants, two items including “financial supports (80.9%)” and “chance to attend some classes (72.3%)” were voiced by male participants more than female participants (see Table 3). Depending on their socio-economic status, participants required significantly different types of support for homeschooling. Whereas starvation line group selected “financial support (83.1%)”, group with middle or higher income asked for a “website for parents (70%)”. As for poverty line group, they demanded a “place for parents to meet and/or get information (58.5%)”, a “website for students (61%)”, “extra-curricular activities (73.2%)”, and “chance to attend some classes (68.3)” more than the other socio economic groups (see Table 4).

Table 3. Support for homeschooling by gender and chi-square analysis*

Items	Female f (%)	Male f (%)	X ²	p	Total f (%)
Curriculum	48 (58.5)	23 (48.9)	1.113	.291	71 (54.6)
Books/materials	60 (73.2)	40 (85.1)	2.442	.118	100 (76.9)
Place for parents to meet and/or get information	38 (46.3)	18 (38.3)	.787	.375	56 (43.1)
Website for parents	46 (56.1)	23 (48.9)	.616	.433	69 (50.1)
Place for students to meet	48 (58.5)	19 (40.4)	3.926	.048	67 (51.5)
Website for students	42 (51.2)	20 (42.6)	.899	.343	62 (47.6)
Extra-curricular activities	50 (61)	22 (46.8)	2.431	.119	72 (55.3)
Financial support	52 (63.4)	38 (80.9)	4.306	.038	90 (69.2)
Chance to attend some classes	45 (54.9)	34 (72.3)	3.838	.050	79 (60.8)
Other	5 (6.1)	0 (0)	2.981	.084	5 (3.8)

*There are missing data ** P<0.05

Table 4. Support for homeschooling by socio-economic groups and chi-square analysis*

Items	starvation line f (%)	poverty line f (%)	middle or higher f (%)	X ²	p	Total f (%)
Curriculum	27 (45.8)	25 (61)	20 (66.7)	4.275	.118	72 (55.4)
Books/materials	45 (6.3)	35 (85.4)	20 (66.7)	3.438	.179	100 (76.9)
Place for parents to meet and/or get information	19 (32.2)	24 (58.5)	13 (43.3)	6.842	.033	56 (43.1)
Website for parents	22 (37.3)	26 (63.4)	21 (70)	11.115	.004	69 (53.1)
Place for students to meet	26 (44.1)	23 (56.1)	19 (63.3)	3.304	.192	62 (47.6)
Website for students	20 (33.9)	25 (61)	17 (56.7)	8.368	.015	62 (47.6)
Extra-curricular activities	24 (40.7)	30 (73.2)	19 (63.3)	11.189	.004	73 (56.2)
Financial support	49 (83.1)	29 (70.7)	12 (40)	17.367	.000	90 (69.2)
Chance to attend some classes	40 (67.8)	28 (68.3)	12 (40)	7.647	.022	80 (61.5)
Other	1 (1.7)	3 (7.3)	1 (3.3)	2.059	.351	5 (3.8)

*There are missing data ** $P < 0.05$

4. Discussion and implications

The results of the present study indicate that a great majority of the participants advocate school-based education. Face to face interaction with teachers, socialization and different education opportunities provided at school come into prominence as leading reasons for school-based education. On the other hand, participants who would prefer homeschooling have concerns for the following: (1) character/morality development; (2) poor learning environment at school; and (3) standardized individuals brought up at school. As elaborated in the Results section, comparison in relation to preferences generated by gender and socio-economic status of the participants reveals significant differences. The results of this study also show parallelism with previous studies carried out in other settings (Bielick, Chandler, & Broughman, 2001; Grubb, 1998; Lines, 2000).

It is also clear from the results of the study that especially education level of participants (in terms of theoretical and practical scientific knowledge) and financial support are important factors influencing preference for homeschooling. When the related literature is reviewed, it is seen that developed countries in terms of education level and socio-economic status implement homeschooling; consequently, developing countries like Turkey need to consider these factors and make educational provisions accordingly while raising homeschooling as an alternative education. Unless a proper planning and preparation is ensured, future generations may fall behind their contemporaries and fail to keep up with fast, complex and changing conditions of scientific and technological age. Hence, as a welfare state, it should play a key role in the protection and promotion of education right of students.

Moreover, the results reveal that parents and students would need meeting places, books and materials, electronic resources, extra-curricular activities, financial support and some classes at schools to attend once homeschooling was allowed. In this respect, Ministry of National Education should set up a department for homeschooling and prepare curricula and educational materials through this department. In addition, it should provide necessary regulations for inspection and evaluation of homeschooled students as well as develop strategies to deal with problems that may come up when homeschooling.

Homeschooling has been and continues to be a controversial issue in Turkey since 2005. Many educators and policy makers have expressed concerns about and opposition to the practice of homeschooling for several reasons. Very little systematic information is available on why families choose to homeschool, how homeschooling influences children's learning, or how the practice of homeschooling influences communities as a whole. Thus, before starting initial configuration of homeschooling as an alternative education system, experiences and reports of countries that allow and implement homeschooling should be analyzed. Educational policies should be structured by considering socio-economic and political conditions of country, demographic characteristics and size of population as well as changes in science and technology. Also, stakeholders such as students, parents, public and private sectors and their opinions and beliefs should be valued. In this sense, the results of this study present a base of useful descriptive information on homeschooling, which should provide more detailed understanding of public whose involvement beliefs lead them to homeschool. The results of this study also offer new information about why some people choose to school or homeschool; in doing so, they may provide a basis for continuing inquiry into family motivations for public, independent, and homeschool approaches to educating children in Turkey.

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