

**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILIES’
MOTIVATIONS TO HOME-SCHOOL USING THE MICROSCHOOL METHOD**

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Doctor of Education Degree

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Abstract

According to the US Census data (2023), since the COVID–19 pandemic, more families are choosing to homeschool their children, the rate of white homeschooled children increased from 5.7% in the spring of 2020 to 9.7% in the fall of 2020. For Asian children, homeschooling rates increased from 4.9% to 8.8% during this same time. There was an overall increase in homeschooling rates among American children. The most dramatic increase was observed in African American families. Homeschooling rose for African American children from 3.3% in the spring of 2020 to 16.1% in the fall of 2020(US Census data, 2023). There could be many reasons why African American families are opting to homeschool their children. More research needs to be focused on homeschooling. Studies completed regarding home-schooling have yet to examine the phenomenon of the increase in home-schooling in the African American community. Studies on home-schooling in the past three decades focused on why parents' decision process to homeschool (Bisson, 2022). Unfortunately, research about the reasons for home-schooling in African American communities are scarce. Information regarding this growing trend among African American families will be explored in this study.

Through triangulation of interviews, a survey, and, observations of African Americans' educational experiences and the evolution of home-schooling will be developed. The researcher will use a qualitative methodology to gain insight into the thoughts and experiences of African American home-schooling parents.

This study addresses the questions: “What factors motivate African American families to homeschool using the microschool setting? And “What learning strategies are used in the Zone of Proximal Development in the microschool?

Keywords: home-schooling, microschools, African Americans, perceptions, equality

PREVIEW

Dedication

As a child, I was inspired by my father. He was an extremely wealthy business owner. He owned a convenience store in a low-income neighborhood. We all worked in his shop and helped after school and in the summer. My father was the most intelligent person I knew. He was brilliant with numbers, but he needed to be more literate. My dad was extremely strict with his children, regarding education. He consistently taught us at home and in his store, covering subjects such as math and important social-emotional lessons. He frequently visited my school, ensuring he stayed updated on my progress. My father was highly regarded in our community and was known for his generous contributions to my schools.

He inspired me to be an educator because he always talked about how teachers let him down in school. They also quickly passed him simply because he was a kind, young man. When I became a teacher, I had the privilege of teaching my dad how to read. Sadly, my father passed away from COVID-19 in 2020. He was my hero, always encouraging me to pursue my doctorate. In honor of his memory, I am now on the path to achieving that goal. This study is dedicated to my beloved father, the late Hurddie Lee.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank my committee chair, Dr. Allison, and my committee members, Dr. Houston, and Dr. Franklin, for their guidance and support throughout this research. Their constant efforts guided this journey, and I am grateful.

Also, I thank the participants of this study, who very graciously shared their stories and school life with me so, I could document their stories and experiences. Thanks also to my friends and colleagues, who guided me to the African American home-schooling community in South Carolina.

Thanks to the late Barbara and Hurddie Lee, who always taught the value of education and the importance of representation. My parents were active community members and taught me the value of service and contributing to society.

Finally, thanks to my husband's encouragement and my children, who motivated me daily.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

The public school system in America was initialized in 1787 as a requirement after the Revolutionary War (Paterson, 2021). In the early days, American mothers were primarily responsible for instructing their children at home, leading to many children staying home and engaging in work (Gold, 2023). The mother or a family member taught many of the first American home-schooled children to read and write in the 18th century (Gold, 2023). The focus was to ensure that children knew how to read the Bible (McCalman, 2021).

However, once the settlers' population started to grow, each colony was obligated to establish at least one school for educating students academically, but these schools only catered to the wealthier population (Wright, 2019). This education plan did not include African American children. During this period, African Americans were not permitted to learn to read and write. They were considered the property of the Puritans as enslaved people (King, 2017).

However, African Americans found ways to overcome the many obstacles of poverty and barriers. For example, it was originally against the law for African Americans to read and write (King, 2017). Only a few white individuals were willing to sell or rent property to African Americans to establish a school; therefore, it was frequently difficult to find a suitable building (Danns & Purdy, 2019). Many African Americans had to learn to read and write in churches in 1866 (King, 2017). However, before Emancipation, whites denied or restricted African Americans from learning.

Consequently, African Americans faced many challenges in creating schools during Reconstruction (King, 2017). The problems included teacher shortages and lack of funding to pay teachers (Danns & Purdy, 2019). Additionally, the number of literate African Americans instructing children was scarce (King, 2017). As a result of this, black communities often struggled to afford to pay teachers' salaries (Danns & Purdy, 2019).

The African American communities gained federal assistance from the Freedmen's Bureau (Danns & Purdy, 2001). They helped to place northern teachers in Freed people's schools in the Southern and Border States. In addition, the Freedmen's Bureau provided the teachers with transportation (Danns & Purdy, 2001). The local African American communities contributed to the teachers' room and board. This movement was the start of segregated public schools in America. The 14th Amendment's Equal Protection Clause requires that states provide equal access to public schooling for all children, regardless of race (U.S. Constitution, National Archives, 2017). The schools remained segregated. Initially, public schools in America did not include African Americans. The African American community had to fight to become a part of the country's education system. (Anderson, 1988).

By the 1950s, most African American students who still attended segregated schools obtained funding at rates many times lower than those serving whites and institutions of higher education (Busby, 2022). In 1954, in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, racial segregation of children in public schools was found unconstitutional in America (U.S. Constitution, National Archives, 2017). This judgment eliminated the separate but equal idea, including the Jim Crow Laws (U.S. Constitution, National Archives, 2017).

Despite the integration of many American schools in the 1970s, the issue of equality persists (Busby, 2022). Kozol (1991) highlights significant disparities between public schools catering to students of color and those in suburban areas. These disparities extended to funding resources and educational opportunities (Kozol, 1991). In the suburban schools, students had access to computer skills, foreign language instruction, and laboratory-based science investigations. Conversely, students in the low-income area required additional resources (Kozol, 1991).

Parents in African American communities are acutely aware of school disparities based on zip codes (Busby, 2022). Their heightened expectations from the current public education system, driven by concerns over persistent achievement and opportunity gaps have increased (George, 2019). Many African American families believe these gaps result from unequal access to vital educational resources (Anderson, 1988). These beliefs became evident during the 2020 national COVID-19 pandemic, as many African American families witnessed the impact on their children's education. During the Pandemic of 2020, many African American families were forced to educate their children at home and saw firsthand exposure to alternative educational approaches (Bogan et al., 2022). The Pandemic compelled many families to home-school their children (Bogan et al., 2022). While home-schooling was not a new concept, it was a novel experience for many African Americans in the twenty-first century. During the Pandemic, the number of African American families home-schooling their children increased, and this trend continues to rise rapidly (Bogan et al., 2022).

Background of Study

Home-schooling has come a long way, transforming from an unconventional and frowned-upon educational method into a respected and viable alternative to traditional schooling (Helton, 2023). The home-schooling approach emphasizes that learning should be self-guided and revolve around the child's needs (Anglum et al., 2023). This movement has gained popularity in diverse American communities in recent times.

The modern home-school movement began in the 1970s when John Holt, an education theorist and supporter of school reform, began arguing that formal schools' focus on rote learning created an oppressive classroom environment designed to make children compliant employees (Home Education, 2021). Holt was born in New York City on April 14, 1923. He had a traditional education, graduated from Yale University in 1943, and was a submarine officer during World War II (Ray, 2019). After his military career, Holt became a teacher in public schools. Holt opposed traditional education's rigid and authoritarian nature (Nall, 2018).

This discontent led him to explore alternative educational philosophies, including the works of A.S. Neil and his Summerhill School in England, which emphasized freedom and individualism in education (Nall, 2018). In his first book, Holt called for parents to liberate their children from formal education (Nall, 2018). Holt's first book, *How Children Fail*, published in 1964, critically examined traditional education's shortcomings (Ray, 2019). Holt argued that the conventional system failed children by stifling their natural curiosity and creativity. Holt believed that children are born with a natural desire to learn, and the traditional school system was squandering their innate curiosity (Nall, 2018).

Using Holt's ideas, Raymond Moore expanded the idea of home-schooling.

Moore was one of Holt's friends and an educational theorist. He worked to convince parents to home-school their children until the age of eight (Moore, 1981). Moore argued that public school at an early age was detrimental to children (LeBlanc, 2022). According to Moore (1981), children should receive their education at home until they are around eight or nine. This approach gives them a solid educational, psychological, and moral foundation (LeBlanc, 2022). Many parents moved their children from the traditional public setting to the home-school model, but it was not a widely accepted form of education. Due to the current erosion of the U.S. educational system (2020), many American parents have opted out of the traditional public school and chosen the home-school option for their children.

National Center for Education Statistics (2020) data estimated that 1.5 million kindergarteners through Grade 12 were home-schooled in the United States in 2007. Since the National Pandemic of 2020, 2.65 million children (about the population of Mississippi) have been home-schooled in the United States of America (National Center of Education, 2020). There has been a rapid growth in home-schooling in marginalized communities, as well. African American home-schooled children rose from 3.355 to 16.15 in 2020 (National Center of Education, 2020). According to the South Carolina Department of Education (2029), the number of children being home-schooled surged by 45%, rising from 20,511 in the 2019-2020 academic year to 29,927 in the 2020-2021 academic year due, to the shift towards virtual and hybrid learning. This substantial increase in home-schooling has captured the attention of educators, making it one of the

fastest-growing educational movements compared to traditional public or private schooling (Gilbert, 2021).

Problem Statement

The problem is that the factors that drive African American parents to home-school their children using the micro-school model are unknown. In the 1970s, John Holt's ideas on home-schooling helped lay the groundwork for this modern-day home-schooling movement. Holt's philosophy of child-led learning, individualized instruction, and parental involvement became central beliefs of home-schooling practices (Holt, 1967). Through Holt's books, articles, and speeches, he inspired countless parents to take charge of their children's education (Holt, 1967). About 50 years later, Holt's ideas have gained momentum. The home-schooling movement has grown significantly in all communities, gaining recognition and legal support in America (National Center of Education, 2020).

The number of home-schooled students is also increasing in marginalized communities. African American families have a noticeable surge in choosing to home-school their children (National Center of Education, 2020). This trend represents a significant departure from the public school system. Educators are interested in this movement because it raises questions about its underlying causes and implications. Educators must understand what pushes parents to change their child's education significantly. Information about African American families' motivations for opting out of public education in America is scarce (Reilly, 2022). This qualitative study explores why African American parents are losing faith in American Public Schools.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors driving the decision of African American families to educate their children using the Microschool method. By examining their motivations, experiences, and broader sociocultural context, this research sheds light on the reasons for this demographic's growing home-schooling trend. The study aims to inform educational policymakers, administrators, and practitioners about the specific needs of African American students, and it could help develop a justification for alternative education responsive to changing moral understanding about individual rights and community beliefs. Furthermore, it can help public school systems to become informed of the concerns of parents and community members who want the public school to reinforce the values and identity of the local community.

This research will investigate the underlying reasons behind the growing trend of African American families who home school their children. This study explored the motivations, challenges, and experiences of African American parents, who have decided to home school as a solution. Focusing on how socio-cultural, educational, and institutional factors influence their choices. By delving into the unique perspectives of these families, this research completed a phenomenological study by providing valuable insights that can inform educational policies and practices, promoting a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape for African American students in South Carolina. This research included interviews, observations, and surveys of African American families who currently home-school their children.

Significance of Study

This qualitative study can provide valuable insights for parents, teachers, and school leaders. It seeks to understand why African American families choose home-schooling and sheds light on their belief gap in the American educational system. Educators can self-reflect on their social, educational, and pedagogical practices, while teaching African American students to ensure they are actively engaged and developing into successful students. The findings of this study can facilitate collaborative efforts among parents, teachers, and school leaders to drive essential changes and school reform.

Parents can use this study to discover various educational options for their children, realizing that sending them to public or private school is not their only choice. Parents have the right to educate their children at home, a right grounded in the principles of individual liberty and parental autonomy, as recognized in many democratic societies (Reilly, 2022). Home-schooling allows parents to customize their children's education according to their unique needs, values, and learning styles, granting them the freedom to shape their children's education as they see fit (Asare,2023).

Furthermore, teachers can use this study to ensure they include culturally responsive teaching in the classroom. Culturally responsive teaching means using students' customs, characteristics, experiences, and perspectives as tools for better classroom instruction (Gilbert, 2021). This type of teaching will help students of color see themselves and their communities as belonging in schools and other academic spaces, leading to more engagement and success (Billings,1995). Additionally, this study can help teachers check their biases that can hinder a child of color's progress and access to advanced levels of coursework.

School leaders can utilize this study to promote an inclusive school culture. They can use the reasons parents opt out of public schools as a checklist for school improvement. For example, many families display frustration with the lack of playground equipment for special needs students. School-level administrators could make sure they order playground equipment that includes modifications for special needs children.

Also, many school leaders can incorporate restorative practices to address discipline disproportionality issues in today's public schools. Restorative practices are employed in schools to cultivate an equitable and positive school culture, emphasizing reinforcing relationships and connections among individuals within the school community (Gilbert, 2021).

Research Questions

This research sought to broaden our understanding through a qualitative study of the rapid growth of home-schooling. It delved into the reasons why African American families opt out of the public and private school systems in America. Additionally, it examined the challenges African American students encounter in the public school system. Lastly, it explored the various curricula and home-school models available for parents to choose as alternative educational options.

The two research questions that guided this study are as follows:

- RQ1: What are African American parents' primary motivations and beliefs for choosing to homeschool their children within a microschool environment in the Southern United States?
- RQ2: What learning strategies are used within the Zone of Proximal Development in the microschool in South Carolina?

Introduction to Theoretic Framework

Socio-Cultural Theory

Lev Vygotsky is a Russian psychologist and philosopher (Feinberg, 1998). He developed Socio-Cultural Theory during the early 20th century. Vygotsky focuses on the cultural and social influences on human development. The socio-cultural theory explains how social interactions and cultural context shape cognitive development. Vygotsky's theory is also known as the Social Development Theory (Feinberg, 1998). According to Vygotsky, individuals' mental processes are inherently intertwined with the socio-cultural environment in which they exist.

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory is relevant for helping African American students in a microschool setting. This theory explains the effects of social interactions through collaboration with peers and the knowledgeable others. In a microschool, the educator can include the students' cultural background, community engagement, and family participation to increase the students' fluency in other subjects (Hess, 2023).

Definitions

The following operational terms were used in this study:

Home-schooling: The practice of educating children and youth in a learning environment that is home-based and parent-led (Ray, 2004)

Private school: Privately funded education, usually by attending families. Private schools can be selective about gender and socioeconomic status (Pierce & Claybourn, 2023).

Public School: Government-funded education that all students can attend regardless of socioeconomic status, creed, religion, gender, or race (Pierce & Claybourn, 2023).

Charter School: A tuition-free school of choice that is publicly funded but independently run (Prothero, 2018).

Marginalized communities: Populations are groups and communities that experience discrimination and exclusion (social, political, and economic) because of unequal power relationships across economic, political, social, and cultural dimensions (Giovanna, 2021).

Culturally responsive teaching: Teaching that connects students' cultures, languages, and life experiences with what they learn in school (Will & Najarro, 2022).

Home-school co-op: A Home-school cooperative is a supportive group that helps provide quality courses and experiences for home-schooled students to receive at home (Johnson, 2023).

Restorative practices: Restorative practices focus on resolving conflict, repairing harm, and healing relationships. They support a positive and safe school climate, prevent bullying, exacerbate inequity, and reduce disciplinary incidents (Chardin, 2022).

Microschools: A form of homeschooling that has a mission to empower children and guardians to individualize education and reach their fullest potential (Hess, 2023).

More knowledgeable other: Anyone with a greater understanding of the task or concept that the child is trying to complete or learn.

Traditional homeschooling: A form of homeschooling that is also called school-at-home. People who follow the traditional home-schooling method will buy a complete curriculum for the entire year. The curriculum is taught by the guardian of the child (Lippincott, 2020).

Classical homeschooling: The idea behind classical education is to teach children to learn for themselves and create ideas with the information. With classical education, there are no specific books or lesson plans to buy. Instead, many different subjects each year create the curriculum for the child's schooling (Bauer & Wise, 2016).

Charlotte Mason: Charlotte Mason is often called the founder of the modern home-schooling movement. She emphasized that children were born people and were not something to fix but little people with ideas and personalities. The Charlotte Mason method focuses on a broad education, including the development of the total person (Lippincott, 2020).

Montessori method: This method is described as an "aid to life" and focuses on observing the child to learn his or her needs instead of sticking to a set academic curriculum. The Montessori Method develops independence in learning, defined by helping the children decide what to learn, freedom, and respect for children, naturally becoming the person they are becoming (Montessori, 1906).

Literature base: This method uses ideas from the classical and Charlotte Mason Methods but uses literature to instruct children instead of textbooks (Teel, 1994).

Self-learning: In the self-learning method, the student chooses what he or she would like to study, and the parent takes on more of a helping role than a guiding role in education. (Lippincott, 2020).

Moore: Raymond and Dorothy Moore emphasize a simple approach to teaching and learning. They believe parents should wait to instruct their children until they are eight to twelve (Moore, 2019).

Thomas Jefferson: The Thomas Jefferson education method is also known as the leadership method. It focuses on a decentralized educational system that focuses on a child's passion for a specific career cluster (Demile,2017).

Unit Study: The unit study method of home-schooling is the idea of choosing a concept or topic to study and establishing ways to integrate various subjects into that one central concept (Lippincott, 2020).

Unschooling: The method of unschooling is letting the child decide his or her educational lessons. There is no formal curriculum, set class time, or required subjects to study. The child has completed educational autonomy (Lippincott, 2020).

Summary

Since the inception of the American education system, African Americans have had to take the initiative to seek knowledge (Ray, 2019). The initial public schools in our country were not designed with the African American community in mind. While African Americans have tirelessly fought for educational equality, there is a growing trend of opting out of public schools and embracing homeschooling.

This shift is motivated by a shared desire to enhance the safety and equity of American public schools for all children. The growth of homeschooling signifies the need for a more inclusive and equitable public school model. Additionally, homeschooling shows promising outcomes, particularly for children of color, reducing the risk of students being funneled into the criminal justice system or local detention centers for minor infractions.

The African American community is genuinely concerned about safety, inclusion, the lack of social context, and equity within the public school system. The aim is to level the playing field, regarding opportunities and empower African American communities to broaden their children's educational horizons at home.

PREVIEW