DIVING INTO THE MINDSET OF HOMESCHOOLING PARENTS A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY IN UNDERSTANDING THE CHOICES MADE BY PARENTS OF HOMESCHOOLERS/UNSCHOOLERS

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Abstract

To study the mindset of parents who are homeschoolers about Homeschooling by conducting detailed interview with these parents. The concept of Homeschooling is discussed and the perceptions and mindset of homeschooling parents is taken into consideration. The parents involved are homeschoolers, Deschoolers and Unschoolers; each of the term is discussed thoroughly. The questions asked to these parents covers their philosophical, psychological, personal, social, and educational ideologies to choose homeschooling and what it meant to them and their children. The questions asked have been categorised in the same order. Six set of parents have been interviewed by the researcher for the purpose of the study. The conclusion drawn out of the interview and observation is the reasons of choosing homeschooling of all the parents have been more or less the same, namely undue pressure on restricted curriculum, unhealthy competition between peers and encouraged by their parents, bullying, inculcation of certain unacceptable behaviours from the surroundings, cultural and social bias, etc. The biggest reason cited is the focus on "One-size-fits-all" curriculum which may not be everyone's cup of tea.

Rationale of the Study

A restricted curriculum and no freedom to do as they wish, is not the kind of curriculum that can produce thinkers of tomorrow and represent the country on a worldwide platform. The individual will become redundant if their creativity is not encouraged. This inflexibility demands an escape route away from the 150 years old "British formal education system." Alternative ways of schooling have emerged across the world and have now entered India as well. Homeschooling is one of these alternative methods or systems of education wherein the parents take charge of the kind of education their wards should be exposed to and the way that education must be imparted.

Homeschooling or home education is educating the children in natural setting away from the four walls of schools and providing freedom to choose the subjects of their choice. At the same time, it is not necessary there have to be any particular subject. Similar concept was introduced by Ivan Illich named **Deschooling** based on which his book "Deschooling Society" is based. Deschooling is the term used to refer to the transition process that children and parents go through when they leave the school system in order to start homeschooling. Another concept of Homeschooling is **Unschooling**. John Holt coined this word which is used to refer to the children who are never sent to school and are part of homeschooling since day one.

The reason researcher has chosen homeschooling as the area of research is because there is dearth of researches about the same in India. Homeschooling has been taking place in India since the 1990's but there are only few researches which have been done and hardly provide any base for the parents. The parents who did homeschooling previously found out their information from homeschooling parents and groups in abroad. But there is no information for the newer parents even after a decade.

As far as parents are concerned, those who have already enrolled their children in the traditional system of education are not part of this study due to the same reason that they are part of the system which is not considered trustworthy by the parents who are or who wish to homeschool their children. Hence, it is very important to understand the perceptions of the parents who are homeschooling their children and the way they are doing it. It is important to understand the reasons due to which they chose homeschooling over traditional schooling. Furthermore, the researcher came across the fact that there are several groups in homeschooling as well. The two groups that the researcher came across are the ones who have withdrawn their children out of school and those who have never sent their children to school. Hence, it became necessary for the researcher to understand the perceptions of both the sets of homeschoolers. It also becomes important to understand the reasons behind the withdrawal of the children from school by the first set of homeschoolers as well as the reasons for not sending them to school at all by the second set of homeschoolers. Not only has the researcher focussed on the perceptions of the two sets of homeschoolers, the difference between the philosophical ideologies of the two groups has also been discussed. It is also necessary to understand their psychological, social, personal and academic perceptions and compare them between the two groups

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Objectives

1. To study the experiences of homeschooling from parents who homeschool their children
2. To compare the experiences of parents who have never set their children to school and who have taken withdrawn their children out of school

Methodology

Sample

The sample includes those set of parents who chose to be different from the general public and decided to homeschool their children located in India, Singapore, and the USA. Six sets of parents have interviewed for the purpose of the study (n = 6).

Procedure

The questionnaire which collects data from parents is an open-ended questionnaire which collects detailed information from the parents about the philosophy of homeschooling and their individual perception about the topic; the psychological and sociological effect on the child; the financial and economic effect for the parents; their expectations from this system of education; the manner in which they dealt with the pressure existing around them related to the competition and social interaction and finally the outcome, i.e., the development that has taken place up till now. This questions in this questionnaire were asked in a face-to-face interview by the researcher or received in the form of a response through email. The researcher also got a chance to speak with the child who was being homeschooled which was heart-warming for her.

The researcher has asked a list of questions which are categorized into following themes: -

i. **Educational** – These questions try to understand why traditional education system has failed in case of their children and their futuristic approach for their children

ii. **Philosophical** – This question helps to understand the true meaning of homeschooling for each group

iii. **Psychological** – These questions try to understand the psychological effects of the decision on parents, children, and immediate families

iv. **Personal** – These questions try to understand the bias of parents towards their children, advantages and disadvantages of their decision, experiences that they go through during homeschooling/unschooling and if they have any regrets about their decision

v. **Social** – These questions try to identify the social interactions of children

vi. **Academic** – These questions try to understand the academic background of carried out in homeschooling/unschooling like use of academic calendar, teaching-learning process, curriculum, assessment, and evaluation

vii. **Feedback** – This question only asks suggestions from these parents to other parents who may wish to homeschool their child/children.

Results and Discussions

It is observed that even though they have not sent their children to school, the concept of unschooling is not much different from homeschooling and hence participants of unschooling have also used the term "homeschooling." The only difference between the two groups is that one group has withdrawn their children out of school while the second group has never sent their children to school. Otherwise, their responses are more or less similar. Out of the six, only one participant spoke about the acceptance of their wards in regular school setting, otherwise everyone else have not taken that aspect into consideration. This may be because it was one of the reasons why they shifted to homeschooling. **These participants do not want their children to be stuck in the 9 to 5 manner of schooling just as a job.** They are very sure that their children will do something good of their life and will always stand out in the crowd by their actions. They will never be deterred by the judgements and apprehensions of others and would go a mile extra to achieve what they want.

This can be concluded with a live example of one of the children of the participants. The daughter of one of the participants is just 14 years old and runs an online business named "Natureous" wherein she makes beauty products naturally and sells them online, through her homeschooling playdates and through business fairs. This shows that the homeschooling children are already into making a living out of their learning experiences. They may have engaged themselves into their homeschooling activities so much that they have found their passion and are already pursuing it. A few aspects that are identified by the researcher are stated as follows:

- **Social skills** –The parents have taken more care that their children are getting equal if not more social interaction as compared to the children going to regular school. It is pointed out by the parents that their children are more social than the regular school going children as their children can strike a great conversation with grownups as well. One of the parent participants points it out that her child has friends ranging from different age groups the eldest one being 89 years old.

- **Holistic development** –Through the interaction with the parents, the researcher mentions that the homeschooled children are very well exposed to holistic development. These children are studying the very necessary subjects like Science and Maths while also study other subjects which interest them. They are also part of many extra-curricular activities like musical instruments and sports. It may be observed that there is hardly any difference between the homeschooled and the non-homeschooled children academically as some way or the other all the children are getting exposed to the same knowledge but in different ways and at different levels of difficulty. The only difference that may be noticed is the amount of respect and humility the homeschooled children have as compared to non-homeschooled children.

- **Personality development** – From the interaction with the parents, it is observed that the homeschooled children have more confidence and are more approachable with newer ideas. They may never be afraid of the judgements made by the society whereas the same may not be the said for the non-homeschooled children.

- **Cognitive skills and utilization of resources** – The parents did not seem very worried about the cognitive development of their homeschooled children as that is considered to be the basic skill that is provided to

them. As far as resources are considered, the parents provide all the resources that their children need as money has never been any concern in any of these families.

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