

PARENTS PERSPECTIVES ON HOMESCHOOLING MANAGEMENT MODEL IN BANGKOK, THAILAND

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Abstract

The objectives of this study were to 1) investigate the reasons for choosing homeschooling of the Thai families in Bangkok; 2) explore the different activities or forms of Thai homeschooling families choose to engage their children in Bangkok; and 3) identify the social interaction skills of the homeschooled children from the Thai families in Bangkok; 4) study the academic outcome of the homeschooled children from the Thai families in Bangkok. The research was conducted with 44 Thai homeschooling families in Bangkok. The sample were families who chose to homeschool the children. The sampling technique was non-probability sampling method with purposive sampling plan to recruit samples to participate in the study. The open-ended questions were applied as the research instrument. The content validity with the S-CVI procedure was applied to measure the validity of the question items. The rating of 1.00, which was suitable for evaluating the content validity of the questions was revealed to ensure that the questions were valid. All 44 families had completed the questions. Among them, there were additional in-depth interviews with 10 families. The results from the qualitative data showed that the homeschooling families were generally satisfied with their children's performance and learning outcome. Feedback from both the children and the parents suggest that homeschooling is more flexible and easier to adapt to different needs and situations of children while comparing to formal school system.

Keywords: *Alternative education, Homeschooling model, Parents*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In modern society, technology is changing people's mindset, the way we work and live, and the traditions we used to hold tight. Education certainly is one of the things changed by technology in the attitude both teachers and learners have towards education. Nowadays, the students and the parents are seeking for more effective ways to receive better education, some of them turn into home-based education (homeschooling), as they think this is a more flexible and intimate way to teach the children. Meanwhile, homeschooling might also be a better way to adopt the technology during learning, because without going to school, a homeschooling schedule would have to deal with online learning, which relies on technology. The combination of technology and homeschooling appears to be inevitable, the lure of huge resources of information online is proved to be a popular and main resource for homeschoolers. The freedom that the online homeschooling curriculum is seen as the only option for some parents to have educational freedom (Luttenegger, 1999). More importantly, other factors might affect the decision of choosing homeschooling over normal school system, such as religious reason, financial reason, cultural background, language reason, and so on.

Apart from the above reasons, in 2020, parents might have another reason to turn to homeschooling, which is the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 has been forcing people all over the world into a 'New Normal' lifestyle as known as "Quarantine life", which has happened for almost one and half year already. For people who have school-age children at home, it is a hard situation to deal with. Schools have been forced to close to keep the children and staffs safe, just like the "work from home" mode, schools turn into "online teaching" during the pandemic time. World Bank's education global practice global director, Jaime Saavedra mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic is causing more than 1.6 billion children and youth to be out of school in 161 countries, this is close to 80% of the world's enrolled students (Saavedra, 2020). During this pandemic, compared to the families who enroll their children into normal school system, homeschooling families seem to be much calmer and more relaxing, because the "new normal" lifestyle is the normal routine for them before the pandemic threat.

Thailand is one of the countries which open the door for homeschoolers, at the same time, while homeschooling is legal in this country, there is little support from the government level as in many other countries. Montgomery (1994) cited that home educators both in the United States and around the world are challenged by government and educational leaders who believe that parents are not qualified to educate their own children (as cited in Cheryl, 2008). As in the past, homeschooling is more popular in Western countries due to the religious reason. According to Kunzman & Gaither (2013), homeschooling, from the point of its modern rapid growth in the early 1980s through the early 2000s, is primarily practiced by white families for religious reasons continue to endure and are borne out by some data (as cited in Cheng & Donnelly, 2019). However, nowadays, as homeschooling becomes legal in some

of the Asian countries, as well as the traditional Asian parents' mind-set about education is changing, more and more Asian families choose the homeschool their children instead of public school system.

At the same time, although homeschooling has been appearing in Thailand for over 20 years, it is still widely considered as a new trend in Thai society. There are still a lot of problems and obstacles regarding homeschooling, that is why it is necessary to find a group or organization for all homeschooling families to provide more information and help (Homeschool Network).

Despite the relatively difficult situation in Thailand, most of the families were giving optimistic outcomes about their children's learning motivation, skills, and the interest they showed in studying in different fields. "From my experience, I found that the learning process of two homeschooling learners started from staying in the environmental that contributed to learning. The learners felt happy, safe from both inside and outside which encouraged them to be curious by natural learning. This process made them success in their way" (Yana, 2018, p. 679).

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research is to explore the situation of Thai homeschooling families in Bangkok, and the advantages and disadvantages of conducting homeschooling in Bangkok, as well as the difficulties and obstacles the families are facing.

The research objectives are 1) to investigate the reasons for choosing homeschooling of the Thai families in Bangkok; 2) to explore the different activities or forms of Thai homeschooling families choose to engage their children in Bangkok; 3) to identify the social interaction skills of the homeschooled children from the Thai families in Bangkok; and 4) to study the general outcome of the homeschooled children from the Thai families in Bangkok.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature aims to clarify concepts and theories and examine previous research to the current research topic. This section includes information necessary to interpret and examine the primary data collected for this study.

2.1 The current situation of homeschooling in Thailand

Homeschooling in Thai society has been continuously developing and evolving as a unique learning style toward specific family goals. However, many operational problems have been encountered. For example, a new homeschooling family usually lacks general experience and trust in the foundations of this new educational concept. Registration with the Educational Service Area Office (ESAO) is required, and the ESAO must be satisfied that the intentions of the families applying to homeschool their children are honorable. However, ESAO officials have excessive workloads with high personnel turnover. Performance evaluation tools for student evaluation are lacking, with weak concrete support from the Ministry of Education (Office of Education Council, 2004, Office of Education Council, 2007).

According to the Budget allocation account for year 2019 of the Education Development Strategy for Sustainability Program under the project to support educational expenses from kindergarten to the completion of basic education of the Office of the Basic Education Commission, Ministry of education of Thailand in 2019, there are 229 families with 308 children registered for homeschooling in Bangkok.

2.2 Reasons of homeschooling

There are different reasons for families to choose homeschooling over formal schools, some are environment related, some are religious related, some are financial related, and some are politically related. Assistant Professor Somchit Udom of Thaksin University concluded the main reasons of Thai families of choosing homeschooling as 1) The parents have more time for the children and the children will have more chances to feel the love, affection and intimacy from their parents; 2) The parents and the children have more choices in learning and teaching, organizing curriculum and suitable activities, in order to fully meet the children's potential and interests; 3) The children will have more freedom and flexibility in learning with a more lively and interesting method; 4) The learning is not limited with time or location, the children will be able to learn through everything; 5) The children will be able to learn from their own direct experiences; and 6) The parents will be able to adjust and improve the learning method for the children at any time (Udom, 2005).

2.3 The academic achievements of homeschoolers

Numerous studies have been done by many researchers during the past more than 30 years shows that in the standardized academic achievement tests in the United States and Canada, homeschoolers have achieved an obvious better result than public school students (Ray, 2016). Certainly, not every homeschooler would achieve a better or equal result as public student, but based on the previous studies, the homeschooling is going towards a more optimistic direction.

Ray (2016) concluded in his study that in the United States and Canada, homeschoolers have consistently scored, on average, at the 65th to 80th percentile, while the public-school students scored at 50th percentile on average. He also cited from previous research that overall research base and state-provided data suggested that following three main things about home-educated students' academic achievement: homeschooled consistently score well above the public school national average; most demographic and other variable studies explain very little variance in the achievement scores of the home educated; parent formal educational attainment explains statistically significant differences in achievement but, small amounts of variance explained is typically less than what this variable explains within the public school student population.

Carnie (2003) mentioned that many home-educated students have been extremely successful in examinations and there have been multiple cases of children taking various subjects several years in advance of their peers at school and receiving good grades. A recent American study also found that home-educated children are on average two years ahead of their peers at school.

2.4 Social, emotional, psychological development of homeschool children

Regarding to homeschool, many would understand it from a literal meaning—a home-based school, which would limit children interaction to others with their own ages, which in turns, it may affect children's social and emotional skills development. In fact, the definition of homeschool being a home-based education is correct in a sense, but with the aid of technology, the community is more connected. Therefore, a simply home-based education is expanding to a more flexible group-based education. Several researchers have found that most of the homeschooled children are developing at least as well as, and often better than those who attend institutional schools (Ray, 2016).

May (2017) thinks that a young child's ability to manage emotions, cognition, attention, and social behaviors emerges from the daily interactions between parent and children. Home-based education provides the foundation for validating emotions and guiding children to find ways to manage their feelings and behaviors. A home-based education rich with opportunities to connect with self, others, and the world around us, imbues children with a strong emotional foundation, the one that they would carry with them for a lifetime (May, 2017).

2.5 The obstacles faced by homeschoolers

Although homeschooling is legal in many countries including Thailand, the government are not providing the equal support to homeschoolers as the formal schools. As in Thailand, according to Rahma, Lestari, & Nugroho (2018), homeschooling in Thai society has been continuously developing and evolving as a unique learning style toward specific family goals. However, many operational problems have been encountered (Engchun, 2017).

Jaisangsan (2012) indicates that home-schooling management in Thailand still faces problems in almost every process. From submitting requests for permission to assessment and evaluation. Which, if looking at it, is a problem caused by the parents and the problems of government agencies together. The Office of Educational Assessment (2008, cited by Yingyongdamrongrit) discussed the problems and obstacles of the homeschooling management that occurred because of the government agencies as 1) the society still does not fully understand the homeschooling management and there is a lack of explanation related to homeschooling to the society; 2) Educational service areas still lack clear knowledge and understanding in home school education, especially the philosophy of home-schooling management concept; 3) The lack of efficiency in providing necessary help and support to the parents who need to register from the districts; and 4) The assessment and evaluation plan for homeschoolers should be different from the plan for formal school students.

3. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research design was applied in the research. Open-ended questions related to homeschooling perspectives were distributed via Google form to 44 Thai homeschooling families who live in Bangkok area. The questionnaire focused more on the general statistics, such as gender, age, economic background, time spent on homeschooling, basic reasons of choosing homeschooling and the approaches. Apart from that, 10 in-depth

interviews were also conducted to further understand the reasons, processes, and outcomes of the homeschooling learning. The interviews focused more on the details and emotional side of the homeschooling families' stories, such as the possible struggles before making the decision of homeschooling, the difficulties and challenges faced by the homeschooling families, etc.

The data analysis method which was used in this paper is narrative analysis. The researcher then interpreted stories that were told within the context of research and/or are shared in everyday life. The collected data on reasons, approaches and outcomes of homeschooling were concluded by the research by focusing on different elements, these elements include, but are not limited to, how the story is structured, what functions the story serves, what is the substance of the story, and how the story is performed.

The research instrument employed in the study consisted of open-ended questions. The content validity applying the CVI scale of the instrument was applied to ensure that the questions were valid. The four experts had reviewed the questions to gauge whether the items were appropriate and related to the topic and objectives of the research. The final score of the questions is 1.00, which was considered valid and appropriate for data collection.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Demographic information

More than half of the homeschooling parents held a university degree (68.2%). It was evident that 36.4% of homeschooling parents were stay at home parents, which was equal to the self-employed status (36.4%). As for the income, 31.8% of the families earned at least 20,000 baht per month.

4.2 Results from the open-ended questions

According to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, the following results were reached, and thus can be divided into four categories as background of families, reasons of choosing homeschooling, learning activities, and learning outcomes.

1. More than half of the families (63.6%) taught their children at home by themselves, while less than half hired someone else to teach the children, including private tutors, teachers, and coaches. It also showed that over 93% of the children had never been to any kind of school of formal educational institution.
2. According to the results, the most common reason that Bangkok homeschooling families chose to homeschool was that they were more interested in a non-traditional approach to children's education. Apart from that, the concern about the school environment, such as safety, drugs, negative peer pressure, and the physical or mental health problem the children were also contributed to the main reasons leading to the homeschooling decision.
3. Regarding the activities the homeschooling families chose to participate, the results showed that over 67% of the families joined activities or co-ops organized by other homeschooling families or homeschooling group, while close to 33% of the families had never joined such activities. The frequency of joining activities ranged from weekly basis to yearly basis. It was evident that most of the families chose to engage their children in community activities, which would help to increase the opportunities of the children in participating in social interactions

with the children and parents from other families. However, the homeschooling families did not participate much for the community activities since 2020, which may be due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation.

4. As for the learning support, bookstores or other learning resources including online learning were the main sources for the families to enhance teaching and learning. Approximately 59% of homeschooling children had taken online course.

5. Regarding the subjects, arts, basic reading/reading skills, and foreign language were the top of the main subjects homeschooling families taught children. The second top three subjects included mathematics, English/literature, and music, respectively.

6. Regarding the outcome or the expectation from the homeschooling parents to their children, the results showed that more than half of the families (57.1%) expected their children to complete education at the university level, the rest planned for their children to pursue further education, finished high school or lower-level education, respectively.

7. The performance assessment result clearly indicates that children did well to very well in almost every subject. In mathematics, reading, spelling, vocabulary, science and social studies, the percentage of the children who received a “Good” mark was the highest; while in language, the percentage of the children who received a “Very good” mark was even higher than those who received a “Good” mark. Surprisingly, in mathematics, vocabulary and language subjects, there were certain number of children who even received an “excellent” mark.

4.2 Results from group interviews

Apart from the questionnaire, the researcher conducted group interviews to 10 homeschooling families in Bangkok. From the group interviews, certain similar patterns regarding reasons of choosing homeschooling, activities related to homeschooling and outcomes were revealed as follows.

It can be observed clearly that all the parents chose homeschooling from the similar reason, which is the preference to individualized education over education from normal school system. All of them encountered difficulties such as lacking support from family members in the beginning, but eventually gained enough support and encouragement, as well as their confidence in continuing homeschooling. All three mothers also expressed their satisfaction about the learning and teaching environment and outcome of their children, as well as the relationship between the parents and the children. Although from the questionnaire, majority of the parents hoped that their children could pursue further education after graduating from secondary school, all the families interviewed by the researcher preferred that they would rather pay more attention on training their children’s survival skill and learning ability than a university degree. Regarding the social interaction skills, although the homeschooling children were mainly educated in a family-focus environment, there were almost no concerns from the parents that the children would encounter problems in socializing, according to the interviews. All the children from the interviewed families regularly joined the co-op activities organized by groups in their neighborhood or groups from social media, it turned out quite well that the children all demonstrated positive attitude towards their current learning situation, as well as

their strong bonds with other families who often joined the activities together. From the interviews, it also seemed that a great number of families who chose homeschooling intended to escape the rather stressful schooling system and to pursue a more active and effective learning environment for their children, although the interviewed cases cannot represent the whole homeschooling family group in Bangkok, it is still a very remarkable phenomenon to observe and study further.

4.3 Discussion of the findings

During a 6-month period of the data collection and in-depth interview, the families showed great interests and willingness to anticipate, as well as raising questions and doubts about the homeschooling situation in Thailand. In addition, they also expressed their frustration in terms of the relatively little support and help they received from the government. In general, most of the parents agreed that their homeschooling practices had gone in the direction as they wished, and they were optimistic that the children would be able to accomplish the goal they had set. The children, during the interview also expressed their satisfaction towards homeschooling as they could stay at home with their parents most of the time, and they could also enjoy the fun with their friends during the homeschooling activities.

While talking about the reason of choosing homeschooling, most of the families made this decision because of lacking confidence in the formal school system or preferring nontraditional education style for their children, some were concerned about the children's physical condition, such as severe allergy to the air or food.

At the same time, around half of the parents mentioned during the interview that pursuing higher level academic achievement such as university degree is not their only desire and is not as necessary as people might thought, although from the questionnaire result, most of the parents expected their children to pursue university or higher education, there was a certain number of parents who chose to follow the children's decision.

The results from the qualitative data showed that the homeschooling families were generally satisfied with their children's performance and learning outcome. Feedback from both the children and the parents suggest that homeschooling is more flexible and easier to adapt to different needs and situations of children while comparing to formal school system. The children tend to have better relationship with their parents, be more independent in learning and house working. Meanwhile, most of the children have positive attitude towards active learning by following their real passion and interests.

5. CONCLUSION

The data from this study confirmed that the most common reasons why the families in Bangkok chose homeschooling are 1) Lack of confidence on educational system; 2) One study model cannot fit everyone; and 3) Child's physical or mental condition is not suitable for school. Most of the families were satisfied with the ongoing homeschooling process and the outcome received so far. Regarding the social interaction aspect which raised the most concerns from the society or those who had doubts about homeschooling, it turned out that all

the children from the interviewed families were able to maintain strong and positive relationship and friendship with other homeschooling children and families. The relationship between the homeschooling families which often met up during regular activities often shared the same purpose and educational concept, a very strong trust and bond was observed during the interview. Meanwhile, the families also expressed certain concerns about the relatively little help and support from the Ministry of Education of Thailand, although they also affirmed that the educational district officials tried to offer as much help as they could. According to the data and interview conducted during the research, homeschooling appears to have strong potential as an informal educational option. It can be a good way to build a close relationship between parents and children, inspire the children through flexible learning group and activity, and to encourage independent learning amongst other benefits.

The results and information gained from this study could be utilized to provide a better understanding about the reason, purpose, attitude, motivation, satisfaction, and outcome levels of homeschooling. Hopefully, the findings from this study can assist both homeschooling families and the educational agencies in improving the current homeschooling situation. In addition to its educational benefits, homeschooling can also set an example for other families who have doubts on formal education system to think outside of the box, and to try different learning model to promote a better learning result for the children.

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