



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

THE MALAYSIAN EXPERIENCE IN HOME SCHOOLING

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By

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Home schooling is the practice of teaching school aged children at home by parents or guardians using a selected curriculum. This alternative form of education is being practiced by a growing number of families in Malaysia. As such, the Ministry of Education has given the green light for intending parents who wish to home school their children to do so with prior permission from the Ministry. Local parents home school for varied reasons. This study was undertaken to explore the reasons why parents home school their children.

A qualitative case study approach was used to study five families that home school their children. A semi-structured in-depth interview was conducted to gather the responses from the parents and the home schooled children. It was then analyzed for themes while concurrently answering the research question why parents left mainstream schooling and opted for home



schooling. Besides relying on in-depth interviews, pupils' notes, exercises, inventions, art work, certificates, letters and reports were also used for the analysis. Non-participant observations were also used to increase validity and reliability of the findings.

The results were analyzed and the following findings emerged. Parents left mainstream schooling because of an inadequate curriculum, incompetent teachers, poor social interactions, an adverse school environment and conflicting values. Conversely, home schooling offered better education, catered for individual needs and family lifestyles and helped foster good values in a positive social environment. The home schooled children reported enjoying the flexibility of learning at home and at their own pace. Some wished they had more friends.

Finally, local home schooling parents adapted well in the prevailing circumstances. As the education authorities neither monitored nor extended any needed help to home schooling parents, parents had to be innovative and adopt ways to find the needed resources and facilities. They ensured that their children had ample social interactions in a multicultural setting.

The findings are consistent with current literature on home schooling overseas. However, the study goes further in forming the base data about why and how local parents home school their children.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

PENGALAMAN MALAYSIA DALAM PERSEKOLAHAN DI RUMAH

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Persekolahan di rumah atau 'home schooling' merupakan peringkat awal pembelajaran untuk murid-murid yang telah mencapai tahap umur persekolahan. Pengajaran untuk murid-murid ini sering dilakukan oleh ibu bapa atau penjaga berteraskan kurikulum tertentu. Sungguhpun pendekatan alternatif ini masih baru di Malaysia tetapi memiliki bilangan pelajar yang agak ramai. Oleh yang demikian, Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia telah memberi kebenaran kepada ibu bapa mengamalkan pendekatan ini setelah mendapat kelulusan daripada pihak berkuasa. Sememangnya ada banyak sebab kenapa ibu bapa mengamalkan pendekatan ini. Penyelidikan ini



dijalankan untuk mengenalpasti sebab ibu bapa mengamalkan pendekatan ini.

Pendekatan kualitatif telah digunakan untuk mengkaji lima keluarga yang mengamalkan pendekatan ini. Temuduga yang separa berstruktur digunakan untuk mendapatkan maklum balas dari ibu bapa dan pelajar-pelajar yang mengamalkan pendekatan ini. Kajian ini telah menghasilkan dapatan penting hubungan kenapa ibu bapa beralih dari sekolah konvensional ke konsep 'home schooling.' Selain dari temubual yang dijalankan, dokumen-dokumen seperti nota murid, kerja latihan, rekaan, hasil lukisan, sijil, surat dan laporan juga dianalisis. Pemerhatian tidak turut serta juga digunakan bagi menambah kesahan dan kebolehpercayaan hasil penemuan.

Setelah dianalisis, keputusan berikut ditemui. Ibu bapa tidak berminat dengan sekolah konvensional kerana kurikulum yang kurang mantap, ketidakcekapan guru, masalah interaksi sosial, suasana sekolah yang kurang menarik dan pengamalan nilai yang tidak sealiran dengan nilai-nilai keluarga. Sebaliknya, persekolahan di rumah menawarkan pendekatan pengajaran dan pembelajaran yang mantap, memenuhi keperluan individu dan gaya hidup keluarga serta mewujudkan suasana dan pengamalan sosial yang positif. Para murid yang mengikuti pembelajaran di rumah sangat meminati pendekatan ini kerana pengamalan pendekatan pembelajaran yang fleksibel dan suasana pembelajaran yang mengikut kepantasan

individu. Dalam masa yang sama murid yang terlibat berharap agar mempunyai ramai rakan.

Dalam hal ini Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia tidak membuat sebarang pemantauan atau sebarang bantuan untuk ibu bapa yang mengamalkan pendekatan ini. Ibu bapa yang inovatif dan kreatif menggunakan pendekatan kreatif yang tersendiri untuk mendapatkan bahan dan kemudahan yang sesuai untuk anak-anak mereka. Mereka juga memastikan bahawa anak-anak mereka terdedah kepada interaksi social yang luas dalam masyarakat majmuk.

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I certify that the Examination Committee has met on 27 June 2008 to conduct the final examination of Ebinezar John A/L Y. Rajamony on his Doctor of Philosophy thesis entitled “The Malaysian Experience in Home Schooling” in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is based on my own original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or at any other institution.

EBINEZAR JOHN. R

Date: 5 September 2008



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview of the chapter

This chapter introduces the context, nature and purpose of the study. The background to the thesis is described followed by a discussion of the research questions and methodology, the significance and limitations of the study.

1.1 Background of the study

Home schooling is often heard amongst parents but no one gives it a second thought because it is novel. Home schooling is one alternative form of schooling that has grown in popularity in various parts of the western world. What exactly is home schooling? It is the practice in which the education of the child is clearly parent-controlled or parent-directed during the mainstream-school hours during the mainstream-school days of the week (Ray, 2000). It can be seen as a temporary or a permanent alternative to the education which is provided by the state or by private schooling (Petrie, 1993 Wood, 2003).

Although home schooling is reported in the news media as a sort of



dissident movement, home schooling has received limited research and scholarly attention (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004). Literature on home schooling falls into three categories - how-to books, first-person testimonials aimed at convincing readers of the merits of home schooling, and a very few research-based studies that aim at scholarly objectivity. This lack of research may, in part, be due to the fact that home schooling represents an overt challenge to the public school system and is thus not apt to be targeted with public or corporate research dollars (Luke, 2003).

Currently an estimated 1.2 million to 1.7 million children are being home schooled in the United States (Lines, 1998; Ray, 1999; Cooper & Sureau, 2007)) amounting to about two to three percent of their school-age population (Bielick et.al., 2001; Ray, 2001). Parents are opting for home schooling in rising numbers in many countries (Ray, 2000). It appears to be making an indelible mark on society in general and on education in particular. It has garnered new interests among parents looking for alternative and innovative ideas in educating their children.

In Malaysia, the home schooling phenomena transited two phases. The first phase was prior to 2003 and the second phase after 2003 when the Compulsory Education Act (2003) was implemented. Prior to 2003, the Minister of Education allowed parents to home school without restrictions (The Star, 2002). But from 2003 onwards when

the Compulsory Education Act was implemented, home schooling was only allowed with prior permission from the Ministry of Education. Only 30 families have so far been given the approval by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, to home school (Ramli Basri, Lecturer, Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, pers. comm. 22 August 2008). Those children who were permitted to be home schooled were solely on medical grounds or the families were not currently residing in Malaysia. The national curriculum together with a curriculum of the parent's choice were permitted for home schooling use (op cit.).

According to Bajunid (2002), the number of children actually being home schooled in Malaysia was around 5,000. There is a great disparity between the official figure and the actual number of children being home schooled. This reflects the number of parents who are willing to adopt home schooling without prior permission from the authorities (Ramli Basri, Lecturer, Faculty of Educational Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, pers. comm. 22 August 2008).

In Malaysia, those families that have obtained permission to home school are placed under the authority of the respective state education departments. An assigned officer from the department would conduct periodic checks on the children (op cit.).

Home schooling in Malaysia is experiencing a growing acceptance and finding an expanding voice on the social and political front. In addition, there is a growing number of websites addressing home schooling in Malaysia (Family Place, Home school Frontier, Malaysian Home Educators Network-Malhen). Some local dailies too have highlighted as to its efficacy and its appropriateness in a multiracial country like Malaysia (Bajunid, 2002; Zoraini Wati Abas, 2001). With a growing interest in home schooling, research in relation to its development and context, present practice and on going scholarly work would seem to be both appropriate and timely.

Home schooling is legal in many other countries. For instance, all fifty states in America have legitimised home schooling. Compulsory-education laws explicitly make home schooling a valid option. It has also liberalized requirements for the home teacher who does not need a teaching certificate (Ray, 2000). However, all states require families to file basic information with either the state or local education agency. Many states have additional requirements, such as the submission of a curricular plan, testing of students, or, less frequently, education or testing requirements for parents (Bauman, 2001).

Home schooling involves the use of a self-selected curriculum. The curriculum may be bought off the shelf or one the parent structures by combining the best from available syllabuses. The curriculum

may be selected based on religious inclinations or pedagogical reasons (Basham, 2001; Hess & Okum, 2002). Besides the curriculum, additional resources like libraries, museums, colleges, extension courses, parks, churches, mentors, private and public schools facilities are used to complement learning (Ray, 2001).

Home schooling allows innovative learning options. In Alaska, teachers in Juneau work with students located all over the state, staying in touch by mail, telephone, and through occasional home visits. In California, children can enroll in an independent-study program through a public school then base their studies in the home. Washington and Iowa require public schools to enroll children on a part-time basis if they apply (Lines, 1995).

People disagree on whether home schooling is advantageous, academically. Research has not determined whether the same children would perform better or worse in a public or private classroom, or in a home-schooling arrangement. Analyses of test scores are available, based on data from states that require testing or from home-schooling associations (op cit). Data from both sources may not be representative of home schoolers as a whole however, because not all families cooperate with state testing requirements and private efforts rely on volunteers. Keeping these caveats in mind, virtually all the available data show that the group of home-schooled children who are tested is above average. The



pattern for children for whom data are available resembles that of children in private schools (Ray,1997a).

People also disagree about whether home schooling helps or hinders a child's social development. Children engaged in home schooling spend less time with same-aged children and more time with people of different ages. Most spend time with other children through support and networking groups, scouting, churches, and other associations. Many spend time with adults other than their parents through community volunteer work, running their own businesses, tutoring or mentoring arrangements, or other activities.

There is no conclusive research suggesting that additional time with same-aged peers is preferable to more time with individuals of varying ages. Limited testing of a self-selected group of home-schooled children suggested above-average social and psychological development (Rudner, 1999).

Some common criticisms of home schooling have also been explored extensively (Rudner, 1999; Webb, 1989; Welner & Welner, 1999). The National Association of Elementary School Principals has maintained that education is "most effectively done through cohesive organizations in formal settings"(1993: 38). Since 1983, it has condemned home-schooling in its platform. Among the anomalies apparent in home schooling were it deprives the child of



important social experiences by isolating them from other social/ethnic groups. They also deny students the full range of curriculum experiences and materials. Furthermore they argue that education should not be provided by non-certified and unqualified persons. Home schooling does not permit effective assessment of academic standards of quality nor do they provide accurate diagnosis and planning for meeting the needs of children of special talents, learning difficulties and other conditions requiring atypical educational programs (op cit).

In spite of criticisms and a general feeling of apprehension towards home schooling, research studies have grown investigating areas like academic achievements and social adjustment of home schooled children including other factors like beliefs, practices, socioeconomic levels, educational background, and ethnicity of home schooling parents (Hess & Okum, 2002). Similarly, academic researchers are exhibiting more than passing interest in home schooling. In June 2000, for instance the *Peabody Journal of Education* devoted a 300-page issue exclusively to the topic of home schooling (McDowell & Ray, 2000). A check on Internet under the heading "*Home schooling*" revealed close to 1.5 million related sites (*Google.com; June 3, 2004*). Another indication of the growth of home schooling is the increase in products catering for home schoolers. There are numerous sites offering their sales and services mainly from the publishing industry. The spiral effect of this



interest has ignited the concerns of policymakers and researchers wanting to look into the reasons why parents forsake a good option at hand via mainstream education, for a path that is foliated and obtrusive, rendering the journey for intended ‘travelers’ an uphill one, both, for the parents and the child alike.

Rudner (1999) has so far conducted the largest study ever on home schooled children in America. In his study involving 20,760 students, he found that home schooled children were above the 80th percentile in most of the academic subjects while the national median of all students were at the 50th percentile. He also found that those who were home schooled their entire academic lives fared better than those who were home schooled for a shorter duration. Home schooled children in grades 1 to 4 performed one grade level higher than their peers in mainstream schools on achievement tests. This achievement test score gap began to widen in grade 5 (Hill, 2000; Rudner, 1999).

1.3 The Problem Statement

The number of parents home schooling in Malaysia which is close to 5,000 children (Bajunid, 2002) is far above the official figure of thirty families provided by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia. The former reported figure represents approximately 0.1 percent of the total number of students attending schools (New Straits Times, May 13,