

Social Skills for Homeschooling Students

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Abstract

This research was meant to provide insight into the impacts of homeschooling on the social life of homeschooled children. The study draws on learning theories from various scholars and theorists, such as Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget, to explain the basis of homeschooling in as far as social development of a child is concerned. The methodological approach of the study was multiple case studies with 12 participants, half of whom were students currently being homeschooled, and the rest were parent instructors. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain qualitative data. The findings of the study showed that homeschooling generally enables children to acquire good morals and values, which are essential in social interactions with people. However, it became apparent that to foster the cognitive development of a child; one needs to be given some time to physically interact with peers, albeit in controlled environments under the supervision of the parents. The study concludes that homeschooling can enhance a child's social skills, provided the necessary teaching approach is taken by the parent instructor to facilitate constructive social interactions with peers.

Keywords

Homeschooling, Education, Curriculum, Social Skills, Morals

1. Introduction

The concept of homeschooling resurfaced in American education in the 1970s when educational reformists showed dissatisfaction with the industrialized education of the time. John Holt is the primary actor in the beginning and redevelopment of the concept of homeschooling in the 1970s. In his work, Holt believed that the formal types of schools only focused on rote learning, which was oppressive, preparing children for compliant employee jobs. His work directly contradicted the line of thought that brought about compulsory education attendance laws in the 19th and 20th centuries (Bauman, 2002). Since the 1970s to

today, the most commonly cited motivations for homeschooling by parents include dissatisfaction with local schools and the need for increased involvement in their children's learning and development.

Early advocates of homeschooling aimed at liberating learners from the constraints of formal education and making them free to follow their interests. Holt advocated against all forms of formal schooling in the belief that the structured education curriculum did not recognize the differences in abilities of children and hence could not bring out their talents. The proponents of homeschooling view formal schooling as synonymous with suffering from children forced to do such activities as sitting down, shutting up, and doing an assignment is an endless cycle of compulsion or forced learning (Bauman, 2002). Formal schooling does not allow children to enjoy what they loved but instead forced them to do what a few purported to be right.

The proponents of homeschooling also supported the idea that children needed to spend more time with their parents. This idea was supported by the social movement of families, especially in the west. They held the belief that the education of children is the right of parents rather than the government (Kunzman, 2012). This approach was a movement against the curricula of public schools. Holt advocated for self-directed learning for children. According to Holt, parents should fit the curriculum to the interest of the child rather than fit the child into the curriculum. These ideas were also promoted by Raymond Moore, who felt that education started too early for children, especially boys who needed to wait for sometimes until they matured before joining school (Ray, 2015). Individual initiative and self-direction are the concepts promoted by proponents of homeschooling.

Pundits and education experts have raised varied arguments about the pros and cons of homeschooling in as far as child upbringing is concerned. A key argument that has been used to discredit homeschooling is that it does not enable a child to acquire social skills, which are necessary for life (Fineman & Shepherd, 2016). Indeed, what impact does homeschooling have on a child's social skills? This question forms the basis of this study. Homeschooling is especially beneficial to young children since learning in a home environment that the child is familiar with, makes him/her more proactive in the learning process. Since the essence of education is to impart knowledge and social skills in children to enable them to interact meaningfully with other people, it is incumbent upon the homeschooling parent to consider the social needs of the child (Guterman & Neuman, 2017a). Whereas homeschooling may prevent the child from acquiring lousy behavior from ill-mannered peers, it may deny him/her the opportunity to learn to deal with people from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. For this reason, even as parents decide to homeschool their children, they need to allow some level of freedom to interact with other children in the neighborhood. The idea behind this is that they can acquire specific social skills, which may not necessarily be taught through conventional learning methods.

2. Significance of the Study

Understanding the experience of homeschooled children users may provide US education with resources that can benefit parents and help them to understand better and develop children's social skills. The learning experiences at home are considered engaging and lively, especially during the younger years of the children (Kunzman, 2012). This understanding can inform parents on how to deal with the children and help them to develop their social skills. Kunzman and Gaither (2013) postulated that the family has a vital role in recognizing the need for homeschooling for the children. At the same time, the findings of this study may encourage parents to reconsider their attitudes toward the adoption of homeschooled to improve their students' learning. Parents' educational experience may encourage them to improve their knowledge and skills in social skills to help their children. Thus, this study may help parents to understand their children's needs and interests better.

3. Literature Review

The debate about whether homeschooled children have the necessary social skills to navigate a world that is characterized by lots of socio-cultural diversities has led scholars and education experts to research more on it as a parallel education system. Contrary to the general assumption that homeschooled children turn out to be antisocial, several studies have found that such children exhibit good behavior that is socially acceptable in society (Guterman & Neuman, 2017b). Statistical data from the research shows that the short-term benefit of homeschooling is that it teaches morals and virtues in children since the child is given full attention by the parent who also doubles up as the teacher. Nevertheless, the long-term effects of homeschooling on the social skills of children remain unexplored and scantily researched. Indeed, Kunzman and Gaither (2013) suggested that parents need to look at the entirety of the child's life progression into adulthood before deciding to adopt homeschooling for their children. This factor means that the guiding principle for homeschooling should be to impart social skills to children to enable them to deal with the social challenges of interacting with people from diverse cultures in the future. All statistical evidence obtained from research indicates that homeschooling has both positive and negative impacts on a child's social skills.

4. Material and Methodology

4.1. Research Questions

This research used multiple case studies to explore the impact of homeschooling on the social skills of children. The following research questions used to guide this study: Central Question, what impact does a homeschooling context have on the formation of children's social skills? Sub-Question 1: How do the instructional practices of homeschooling parents impact the formation of children's social skills?

4.2. Data Collection

Data collection and analysis were from January 2020 to March 2020 in the United States, Manhattan city, KS. A qualitative approach was taken to understand the outlook of homeschooling from both the children and their parents (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The multiple case study design entailed interviews with six students that are currently under active homeschooling, as well as their respective parents or guardians. The participants in the study were three girls and three boys to have an unbiased perspective on the impact of homeschooling on children's social lives.

The six children involved in the study were aged between 13 and 15 years old since it was deemed that children younger than this age bracket may not have the necessary self-introspection abilities required in the study. It follows that to get accurate results on homeschooling, the participants must have been in active homeschooling for at least three years to the date of conducting interviews with them (Yin, 2014). This data was to give a real picture of the effect of homeschooling on children, mainly their perspectives toward social life (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Additionally, the parent instructors of each of the six students were included in the study, totaling 12 participants. The participants were chosen from a pool of diverse children who are currently undergoing homeschooling, and families were recruited by snowball sampled.

The primary qualitative data collection method used in this study was interviewing in which the participants were subjected to semi-structured interview questions. The interviews with the students were conducted first, after which their responses were carefully evaluated before interviewing the parents (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Audio recordings of the interviews were also used to provide a reference to a specific student or parent's responses if clarification was needed during the analysis of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Analysis of the data entailed entering the responses of the participants into a computer and grouping them in line with specific criteria based on the general perspectives portrayed in the responses.

5. Results and Discussion

The data collection method for the study, as outlined above, yielded results, which gave the outlook of children and parents on the usefulness of homeschooling in advancing social skills. Four out of the six children, as well as all the parents interviewed, agreed that homeschooling had allowed them to reflect on the benefits of embracing good morals. The responses from these students showed that they generally preferred homeschooling as an alternative to using a conventional public or private schools. They felt that they were able to develop a more robust understanding of the complexities of social interactions and better placed to make informed choices on how to relate with others. This viewpoint by the four students is supported by Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism approach towards learning, as per Adam (2017). According to social constructivism, a child can deductively acquire social skills and good mannerisms even in a home envi-

ronment, so long as he/she interacts with others through controlled virtual platforms, such as social media (Amineh & Asl, 2015). As such, homeschooling does not necessarily adversely affect a child's social life.

An interesting observation was made from the responses of 2 of the six children who participated in the study. These two students opined that in as much as homeschooling had made them acquire exemplary morals and values, they could not deal with social challenges that present themselves when interacting with their neighbor peers (Medlin & Butler, 2018). The implication of this is that the students lack adequate social skills that are needed to navigate through life, especially in the long term. This perspective concurs with Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which postulates that experiential knowledge is more impactful in the process of intellectual and cognitive growth of a child (Medlin & Butler, 2018). In this case, experiential knowledge means being able to experience one-on-one social interactions with peers and other adults to understand how different people react to diverse emotional stimuli. Therefore, homeschooling has the disadvantage of denying the child the social interactions that are needed to facilitate cognitive growth through experiential knowledge.

Nevertheless, the study also found that despite the challenges of homeschooling, it is an effective educational technique since it offers the child the unique opportunity to develop certain desirable traits without the influence of bad company (Guterman & Neuman, 2017c). The most important thing is that parents who decide to homeschool their children put deliberate efforts to enhance the social life of such children to ensure the holistic growth of a child both intellectually and socially.

5.1. Figures

Figure 1 represents the feedback from the students and their parents regarding the impact of homeschooling on the formation of children's social skills. The majority of the interviewed students and their respective parents agreed that homeschooling significantly contributed to the creation of social skills (67%).

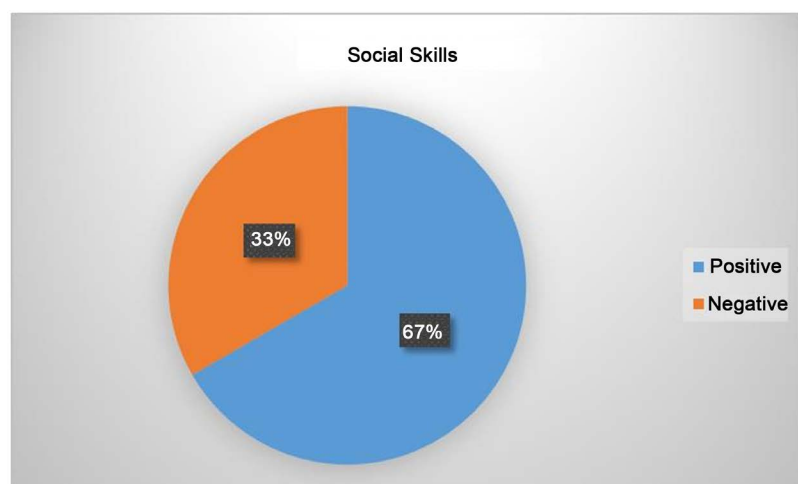


Figure 1. Formation of social skills.

The rest of the respondents (33%) held the belief that homeschooling denied them a better chance to interact with their peers due to inadequate social skills. **Figure 2** represents the responses on good morals in which all the respondents agreed that homeschooling effectively develops virtues in the learners.

5.2. Research Question Responses

This section restates the research questions and provides a detailed explanation of the findings.

5.2.1. Sub-Question One: How Do the Instructional Practices of Homeschooling Parents Impact the Formation of Adolescent Writing Self-Efficacy?

The parents and guardians interviewed for this study offered classes to their students through a modified curriculum based on the student's needs. They administered lessons through a one-one interaction, which ensured that they met the student requirements and could recognize the progress through constant evaluations.

5.2.2. Positive Impact

When interrogated on their acquisition of social skills in their homeschooling, most students admitted that it had significantly contributed to the development of virtues in their lives. The isolation from their fellow peers presented them with the chance to reflect on the relevance of good morals. Their parents offered social interaction with their peers through virtual communication using social networks. Besides, this category of students also believed that homeschooling presented them with the ability to develop a more robust understanding of the complexities of social interactions. Therefore, they had a better placement to make informed choices on how to relate with others, hence their preference for homeschooling as an alternative to using a conventional public or private schools.



Figure 2. Morals.

5.2.3. Negative Impact

A smaller representation of the interviewed students contradicted the formation of social skills through homeschooling. These two students opined that in as much as homeschooling had made them acquire exemplary morals and values, they could not deal with social challenges that present themselves when interacting with their neighbor peers (Medlin & Butler, 2018). The implication of this is that the students lack adequate social skills that are needed to navigate through life, especially in the long term.

5.2.4. Central Question: What Impact Does a Homeschooling Context Have on the Formation of Children's Social Skills?

Evaluation of the feedback from the children in a homeschooling setup reveals that this approach exerts a positive impact on the child. A child develops good morals without the influence of the wrong company, contributing to higher morality standards. Virtual interaction with peers facilitates the formation of social skills in the respective students. However, the practice denies the child's physical, social interaction, which is crucial in cognitive development. The most important thing is that parents who decide to homeschool their children put deliberate efforts to enhance the social life of such children to ensure the holistic growth of a child both intellectually and socially.

5.3. Practical Implication from Research Results

The study reveals that homeschooled children have better social skills compared to their counterparts in public or private schools. Through the customized curriculum, a parent can adequately address the developmental needs of a child since learning is interactive. The parents can further adapt teaching techniques best suited for their children, making learning enjoyable. The contact equally enforces social skills through stronger bonds established between children and their parents or guardians.

All the respondents supported homeschooling as useful in the development of good morals. It shields the children from child abuse, drugs, and other vices promoting healthy growth. Children who get abused from school get stressed, which affects their learning. In advanced cases, some opt to drop out of school. Not only does homeschooling curb this effect, but it also enforces morals through religious teachings by the parent or guardian. Adopting homeschooling also aids parents in nurturing talents and abilities in their children, enhancing their development of skills.

Despite the positive implications, homeschooled children may have difficulties in identifying playmates. Most of the peer interaction is virtual, which implies that collaboration in real life might have complications. It is also evident that the exercise requires the full attention of the parent or guardian for better results. This view makes homeschooling inappropriate for unwilling or busy parents due to the commitment needed to make learning a success. However, parents who choose to adopt this teaching and learning technique should improve

their knowledge and skills for better results. Parents have an obligation of ensuring that their children under the homeschooling program get time to interact with their age mates physically to curb this effect. The exposure will adequately prepare them for life in the corporate world after their education program.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this research have shown that homeschooling in itself is a worthy alternative to the conventional school-based educational systems. As many parents seek to impart good morals and values, coupled with the relevant creative skills in children, they may decide to homeschool them in an environment that is free from negative influences from peers and other adults. Provided parent instructors make the necessary teaching interventions to homeschooled students; the social life of such children will not be adversely affected. The acquisition of social skills in homeschooling is dependent on the individual parent's approach towards homeschooling and their main objectives for adopting this method of child education. All in all, homeschooling can be effectively used by parents to equip their children with social skills to enable them to navigate through diverse social platforms in the future during adulthood.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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