

A Qualitative Study of the Factors that contribute to successful Homeschool graduates


Daniel Garlington

Milligan College

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to focus on attitudes/practices/techniques/strategies that appear in several different homeschooled families that could help point to a commonality that other parents could point to as a necessary factor for a successful homeschooled student. The sample consisted of 2 homeschooled families with 13 children who were taught in a homeschool environment. The study interviewed only the parents of the students. The data for this qualitative study consisted of a survey created by the researcher and interviews with the parents of two homeschool families. The parent survey asked parents questions about their classroom environment, attitudes about school, and methods of instruction used in their homes. The interviews took the results from the two surveys and went more in-depth to understand the responses that were given on the surveys. Results revealed that several practices and similar attitudes were reflected across the families interviewed that have positive effects on the students. The homeschooled students are positively impacted when parents take the time to get to know them and tailor education to fit their needs. Parents who allow their homeschooled children to have a say in their curriculum, and how they are taught, is an excellent way for parents to provide each student with equal opportunities to succeed in a homeschooling environment.

 IRB Decision Testing

 Exempt G

It looks like your study is exempt because your participants will be adults taking conventional tests or surveys under anonymous conditions and that there is no risk to them even if their responses were to become known. [Refer to 45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\).](#)



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Chapter 1

Introduction

Despite the growing number of homeschoolers in the United States, little is known about the practices that are implemented within homeschooling families that enable homeschoolers to succeed academically. In order to help homeschooled students succeed academically, parents use a variety of techniques and strategies that they think will best fit their student. The lack of standard curriculum and teaching practices can make it hard for parents to know what exactly are key commonalities that are found across the board in homeschooling families that help contribute to a successful homeschooled student.

As a future educator, it is important to know and understand what attracts parents to first homeschool their students and then what is done with those homeschooled students that enables them to outshine their public schooled peers. Nationally, enrollment of students in public schooling has dropped slightly due to the variety and expansion of education programs that differ from public schooling (NCES). The lack of governmental oversight and accountability among homeschooling families opens up the possibility for a homeschooled student to receive subpar education at the hands of someone who is not trained to effectively educate their child.

The amount of students with disabilities who are homeschooled is another aspect of homeschooling that needs additional investigation as more power is given to parents in public school environments. Though there is still a stigma attached to the idea of homeschooling, the rise of homeschooling shows that that stigma is being replaced with an acceptance of homeschooling that should be investigated and vetted. Even though the general consensus among adults is that homeschooling can be a viable option for the development of a well-rounded student, the reality is that parents do not know what

it takes to effectively homeschool a student that will be able to succeed academically outside of the home.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to focus on attitudes/practices/techniques/strategies that appear in several different homeschooled families that could help point to a commonality that other parents could point to as a necessary factor for a successful homeschooled student.

Significance

With this data, educators both in the private and public sector can learn what practices can be implemented to help public schooled students succeed in the same way homeschooled students do. Homeschooling families can also see the attitudes/practices/techniques/strategies that affect and impact homeschooled students in positive/negative ways and ways to change those factors.

Research Questions

This research will be evaluating the following criteria of homeschooling families:

RQ1: What do homeschooling parents feel are important teaching strategies for their children?

RQ2: What are the reasons why parents have decided to homeschool their children?

RQ3: What are the most important aspects of a homeschool curriculum?

RQ4: What motivates a homeschooled student to perform well academically?

RQ5: How does a homeschooling family help a homeschooled student interact socially with their peers?

RQ6: How do parents balance work/home life if they work as well as educate their children?

Limitations

1. The research will be conducted within the context of two families available to the researcher to interview, and may not reflect every inclusion or homeschooled education setting.
2. Due to the importance of privacy, some findings may need to be omitted in order to protect participants.

Overview of Study

This research consists of five chapters: Chapter One includes the introduction, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, the limitations, and an overview of the study. Chapter Two examines a review of the literature related to the study. Chapter Three contains all of the research methods that are used in the study. Chapter Four provides an analysis of the study. Finally, Chapter Five contains a short review of the study, a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings, interpretation, conclusions, and recommendations for future study.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

Introduction

While the vast majority of students attend public schools, a growing minority of students are changing their education practice by becoming homeschooled.

Homeschool Environments

As homeschooling becomes more popular in the United States, the diversification of homeschooling is becoming apparent due to the lack of governmental regulations that restrict the “range of practices homeschooling parents may adopt” (Bell & Kaplan, 2016). The traditional settings of a public school provides a set of restraints that do not allow for a certain amount of diversification in the realm of the environment as most schools adopt similar models based around an environment that is often regulated by the state. Homeschool environments provide an avenue through which parents may configure the learning environment to their design and preference in ways the public school system cannot accommodate. The attempt to quantify the differences between homeschooling environments can be quantified along the “axes of support” in three different areas that determine student achievement: student autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Bell & Kaplan, 2016). The first area of support, student autonomy, is an area that has both positive and negative ramifications for the student based on the type of homeschooling environment the student finds themselves. Research has shown that the home environment can be a place for “optimal learning” as it provides an

environment where there is a lot of flexibility in terms of curriculum and the parents institute “highly individualized [programs], involving both homemade and purchased curriculum materials” (Bell & Kaplan, 2016). However, the autonomy associated with an individualized environment can also come with a certain amount of restriction and limitations, especially in religious households (Bell & Kaplan, 2016). Researchers found that the finding about restrictions of religious households who homeschooled students “were corroborated by one of the few empirical studies to examine homeschools as learning environments, which found that religiously motivated home educators (n = 71) endorsed a more controlling motivational style than did public school educators” (Bell & Kaplan, 2016). A variety of factors determine the “motivational climate” of homeschool environments and can determine the amount of autonomy given to the student which can have a drastic impact on student achievement (Bell & Kaplan, 2016). There were a list of attributes that showed positive correlation for student achievement and those were found to be: family demographics, including higher levels of income, parental education, parental occupations, smaller family size, consistent emotional warmth, involvement, and regard (Bell & Kaplan, 2016). The variety of factors that can be attributed to student achievement show both the positive aspects of parents being able to modify and individualize instruction for their child, however care needs to be taken not to undermine the positive benefits by having detrimental parenting beliefs and behaviors that could affect these positive traits (Bell & Kaplan, 2016).

Another aspect of the homeschooling environment that differentiates from the traditional model is when parents redesign their educational model by “forming partnerships with districts, organizing themselves into collaboratives, and finding ways to promote equity” (Hirsh, 2019). Hirsh explains how, historically, homeschooling was either a “yes” or “no” option that relegated parents into choosing two strict options with not a lot of diversity in how content was taught. The advent of the internet and the meteoric rise of homeschooling in the United States has birthed a whole new realm of options for homeschooling families when it comes to how parents choose to homeschool their children (Hirsh, 2019). The involvement that can now be customized around homeschooling families in various ways including using: online resources, co-ops, district extracurricular participation, homeschool assistance programs and microschoools (Hirsh, 2019). The simple act of setting up a facebook page can help parents differentiate their homeschool environment by bringing in other parents and support from the use of an online resource where ideas can be shared and questions asked. Every state in the United States has resources where homeschooling families can connect with other homeschool families and find connections in regards to curriculum, field trips, and engaging with other families (Hirsh, 2019). An aspect of a homeschool environment that brings in other homeschool families coalesces in the form of a homeschool co-op. A homeschool co-op recognizes the importance of collaboration and utilizes resources within the context of the connections had between several families. An example of a homeschool co-op at work would have parents meet together, while students participate in an enrichment activity, “such as learning chess from a local

master” (Hirsh, 2019). The diversity of homeschooling options has provided an option for parents who “want the flexibility of homeschooling combined with the opportunities of a traditional school” as well (Hirsh 2019). Some schools offer a hybrid model of homeschool and traditional model of schooling by having students attend a traditional school one or two days a week and then homeschooled for the rest of the week (Hirsh, 2019). This type of cooperative educational model is called a partial day school and is touted as being beneficial for students as students have the opportunity to “gain the experience of learning in a traditional classroom and reap the benefit of individualized home education” (Hirsh, 2019). The rise of parent choice has eroded the binary between homeschooling and traditional education through private and public schooling and the government has helped blur that line by offering opportunities for students to interact and engage with traditionally schooled children while being homeschooled (Saiger, 2016). An example of the government enabling this softening of distinctions between educational models is seen through legislation that allows homeschoolers to take part in activities and be eligible for certain minimal subsidies, much like private schools, such as “when they are allowed to use public school facilities or transportation without charge” (Saiger, 2016). Policies regarding the use of public school facilities for homeschooled students vary by state yet many states and districts allow homeschool students to “participate in sports, theater, arts, and other extracurricular activities offered by their local school district while completing core

educational curriculum at home” (Hirsh, 2019). The involvement of parents within the school system has opened up new opportunities for districts to allow parents to decide how much to engage their children in public schools (Hirsh, 2019). An example of this “a la carte” version of homeschooling can be seen in Washington state where Olympia School District in Washington state “provides homeschool students in kindergarten through 12th grades access to courses taught by licensed teachers, free of cost” (Hirsh, 2019). As more focus is given to homeschooling options in the educational system, more and more options and variations of homeschooling are sure to appear as traditional school systems attempt to accommodate the growing numbers of homeschooling families.

Homeschooling Structure

The structure of a homeschool can take a variety of forms and is affected by a host of factors that mirrors the different ways a homeschooling environment is set up. The distinction between structure and environment comes down to the level of focus. The homeschooling environment is constructed of the outer, visible aspects of the type of homeschooling that is categorized and displayed to the world. The actual structure of a homeschool takes into account the personalities of the instructors, the type of curriculum, and the various specific factors that make up the internal structure that act as the inner working of the homeschooling environment. Another key aspect surrounding the structure of a homeschooling environment can be tied to the parents and focuses in on the aspect of parents’ personality and socioeconomic status. Bell &

Kaplan mention how families can restrict their child by not having the appropriate resources to provide opportunities for their students; while Guterman & Neuman unpack the effect socioeconomic effects that can be had on the children of homeschooling parents. The effects of having a higher socioeconomic status when it comes to homeschooling is seen through Guterman & Neuman's research which found that

“mothers with higher levels of education and from strong socioeconomic background families spent more time with their children in activities aimed at acquiring skills—such as doing homework and reading books—and less time watching television, and played a greater role in organizing activities outside of the home. (pp. 78)

The converse was also found to be true with findings showing that parents of lower socioeconomic status “faced obstacles to involvement, such as less flexible work hours, lack of resources, transportation problems, and pressure due to living in disadvantaged neighborhoods” (Guterman & Neuman, 2018). The personalities, in addition to socioeconomic factors, play a large role in the structure of homeschools. Research has shown that certain personality types can contribute to a large difference in the type of homeschooling structure with evidence showing that “extraverted parents can contribute to more active and assertive parenting, which involves a greater emphasis on discipline and boundaries” (Guterman & Neuman, 2018). Research has also shown that “parents with a high level of conscientiousness were likely to raise their children in a more structured and consistent environment” (Guterman & Nueman, 2018). While homeschooling environments do not lend themselves to an easy categorization, as there are so many factors that can set apart the different styles of homeschooling, two

major categories emerge from the research in the form of “structured” and “unstructured” homeschooling (Guterman & Neuman, 2018). The term “structured” homeschooling refers to the idea of transplanting the traditional model of schooling in the public arena at home (i.e. “school desks arranged in rows, saluting the flag in the morning, blackboards on the walls, formal textbooks, workbooks, teachers’ lectures, and tests”) (Guterman & Neuman, 2018). “Unstructured”, as the name implies, refers to the approach parents take that places student interest as the most important criteria for homeschooling and the desires of the learner supersede the desires of the parent in relation to what is studied (Guterman & Neuman, 2018). However, despite the distinctions made between separating homeschooling environments into two separate categories, multiple variations of structure and unstructured schooling can occur. The research shows that “few homeschooling families adhere exclusively to either of these dichotomous divisions. In fact, the contrary seems true. The trend today appears to be a mix-and-match approach, based on the needs of the parents who choose homeschooling. Each family combines the principles it favors to guide its development of a process that fits the specific children and parents (Guterman & Neuman, 2018). One of the ways that parents choose to homeschool that aligns with the “unstructured” model, is through parents teaching their children through a “child-led, natural learning approach” that is occasionally associated with parents who profess to be using an “attachment parenting approach” to educating their children (English, 2015). The idea of “attachment parenting approach” comes from Australia where parents who take this approach tend to focus on the needs of the child and take their cues from the child

rather than from tradition or previous practices and have more of a caregiving type approach to child-rearing that usually features practices such as “infant-cue and extended breastfeeding, child-led weaning, cosleeping” and other practices (English, 2015). This type of “natural” teaching of children is highly unstructured in that is not rigid in its implementation of curriculum or even expectations for the child, with students often not receiving corporal punishment and instead there being a lot of “communication” between children and parents (English, 2015). The reasoning behind the decision for these “attachment style” parents who utilize this educational model to teach their children was found in the explanations from parents who expressed how they believed that home education was central to their educational practices and those practices helped “establish a strong connection and bond between themselves and their children” (English, 2015). The desire to establish a “strong connection” with their children was sometimes associated with an anxiety linked to leaving their children “with strangers” in a traditional school setting (English, 2015). The anxiety experienced by both parents and children that is sometimes associated with traditional schooling models can be linked to parents who display symptoms of having “attachment anxiety” (Guterman & Neuman, 2018). The term “attachment anxiety” is “associated with greater fear of impairing one’s relationships and losing ties with close people” and can be attributed to parents who consider themselves “attachment style” parents and can thus be hypothesized “that shared hours of learning constitute—even if only unconsciously—a means for a mother to strengthen and validate her relationship with her child” (Guterman & Nueman, 2018). This is not to say that all parents who have

unstructured or who have adopted “attachment style” parenting strategies have attachment anxiety, however there is a link that shows this can a possible explanation behind why some parents choose to homeschool their children and do so in a way that is far removed from traditional models (Guterman & Neuman, 2018).

Parental Involvement

The role of parents in the homeschooling environment is pivotal, as they fill a variety of roles usually delegated and filled by a host of personnel in the public & private school system. The assumption of these roles upon the parents provides a deep level of interaction between the parents of homeschooled children and can be described as being “more intensive than usual ([than] when children attend school), because the parents and children spend much more time together (Guterman & Neuman, 2017). While parents play a large role and fill the main amount of time spent face to face with their child, the need for social interaction comes into play with the absence of a larger community often found in public & private schools. Research has found that the personality of the parents can often have an impact on the amount of social interaction had by the students, with extroverted parents being shown to have an easier time forming “social ties with other parents” and therefore being able to more easily “initiate connections that enable the creation of social situations for the child” (Guterman & Neuman, 2017). The benefit of having learning experiences, including social interactions, that extend beyond the home environment is seen through the types of learning that is not solely restricted “to textbook learning and standardized curriculum”

(Baidi, 2019). The homeschooled student is more easily able to participate in learning that happens both inside and outside the home “and thus, the dimension of learning in homeschooling covers academic and practical knowledge” which may be attributed to academic success of homeschooled students (Baidi, 2019). The magnitude of the influence of the parent in a homeschooled environment is seen through the homeschooled parents’ “stronger efficacy in designing and fabricating effective learning” which can only be achieved through the creation of safe, healthy learning environment (Baidi, 2019). The importance of having a safe environment in which their students can thrive academically is a main concern among homeschooling parents who argue that safety and health “seems to be neglected in public schooling” (Baidi, 2019).

Homeschooling and special education

The years from 1997 until 2007 has seen a 74% increase in the amount of homeschooled children in the United States (Morse & Bell, 2018). Researchers found that parents were divided into two groups when it came to how they saw their role as educational figures in the lives of their children. Parents who saw themselves as ultimately responsible for their child’s education were designated as having a “parent-focused role construction” that was primarily motivated by “strong beliefs about their parental role, their efficacy for helping their child learn, and their beliefs about the personal resources available to help them educate their children” (Morse & Bell, 2018). Conversely, parents who saw themselves more as partners with their community had a “partnership-focused role construction” that, while similar to those parents who had a

“parent-focused role construction”, put a heavier emphasis on the role of their community and the resources they could bring to the table in regards to how they deal with their child’s individual needs. The researchers also found that parents who aligned with a partnership-focused role construction “appeared to be motivated by their value beliefs regarding moral and religious issues, appropriate curricular content for their child, appropriate teaching practices for their child, and beliefs about public school abilities to deal with their child’s individual needs” (Morse & Bell, 2018). Regardless of how the parents viewed their role in their child’s education, the researchers found that “a high percentage of parents who were currently homeschooling children with SEN (special education needs) had initially placed their children in traditional public or private school environments” (Morse & Bell, 2018). This is important to recognize since having the knowledge that students who have special education needs have experienced the public or private school setting creates a certain understanding that parents were dissatisfied with whatever kind of schooling their child received, whether that be in the public or private educational arena. The researchers found that “only 1 of the 13 families interviewed chose to homeschool their child without first attending public and/or private schools” (Morse & Bell, 2018).

Similar to the research done by Morse and Bell, researchers Wolf and Tuchman viewed “parental satisfaction as one of many important indicators for the quality of special education services” (Wolf & Tuchman, 2016). Previous research had shown that there was a correlation between parents who were dissatisfied with the state of

education for their SEN child, and the majority of special needs students were served at public schools as only 3% of students with disabilities attend private schools (Wolf & Tuchman, 2016). A reason why private schools may be behind the curve as far as reaching special education students is because of the lack of oversight and regulations enforced by such laws as IDEA that public schools are required to abide by. The researchers explained that “most private school choice programs do not require that schools maintain Individualized Education Programs (IEP)” which is student centered and places a strong emphasis on the role of the parent in making decisions for their student (Wolf & Tuchman, 2016). The researchers were also quick to point out that while the parent may know how to better implement academic changes that best suit their child’s needs, however, the parent may lack in the pedagogical knowledge that is afforded through special education teachers that are more knowledgeable in academic techniques and strategies (Wolf & Tuchman, 2016). Similar to previous research, the researchers found that “parents elected to homeschool primarily because they were unsatisfied with the services and care that their previous school was providing or wished to shield their child from bullying, stigma, and other negative school interactions” (Wolf & Tuchman, 2016).

Conclusion

While there are a host of contributing elements that contribute to a successful homeschooler, certain factors and distinctions rise to the surface. Out of the

homeschooling milieu, certain traits seem to allow for a distillation of information relating to what constitutes a successful homeschooled student. The role of parental interaction is a crucial, and largely involved, aspect of a successful homeschool that is seen in the interrelated and interconnected curriculum, relationships, and attitudes tied up in a home environment. Parental involvement also plays a large role in the continuing expansion of educational choices available to parents of students with disabilities. The changing aspect of structure and environment of homeschools can be both a boon and a deterrent to parents of students with disabilities. Parents of students with disabilities often have a deeper understanding of their students' needs, which can be a deciding factor in deciding whether or not to homeschool. As public schools continue to expand the power of parents in the decisions made for their children with disabilities, parents have to decide whether or not they have the capabilities and resources available to successfully educate their children in a homeschool environment. The academic instruction of homeschooled students can also be seen as an extension of parents' beliefs, as instruction is tinged by the parents' socioeconomic background, personality, education and religious beliefs. In addition to the variety of factors that make up the impact of parental involvement, is the role of the larger environment that is either interacted with, or seen as intrusive, within the homeschooling environment. The homeschooling environment continues to morph and take on different names as more and more parents choose to homeschool their children. Microschools, co-ops, online schools, and a mix of these options all constitute a different aspect of homeschooling that cannot be regulated to the historically dichotomous separation of traditional and

homeschool. Regardless of the name, homeschooling continues to expand and grow as more and more parents see the benefit of homeschooling their children.

Chapter 3

Methodology and Procedures

Population

Participants (approximately N = 13 homeschooled students) in this study will be homeschooled students and families in grades K through 12 from at least 2 homeschool families. These students, ages 5-25, represent the four different homeschooled families, and are separated by the differences in how the homeschooling environment is constructed. The student population in this study comes from a range of areas both local (Tennessee) and international (Spain). The participants come from a variety of homeschool backgrounds that include co-ops and independent families that do not link up with other homeschool families.

Data Collection/Materials

A qualitative approach will be taken in developing the research instrument for this study. The need to leave room for discussion and the observation of homeschooled families necessitates a qualitative approach that allows for the researcher to discern aspects of homeschooled families that are not restricted to quantitative data. A survey will be used and the interview/data collection process will be largely narrative and visual in nature, in order to gain insights into the differences in homeschooling and the various attributes that are connected between the different homeschool environments. Data collection will

be relegated to narrative data that will include details from the various homeschool families. The qualitative data will be analyzed inductively by synthesizing all the information collected from various sources into common themes or patterns. Data will be collected directly from participants through observations, interviews, and other types of records and artifacts. The questions are designed to gather responses which are related to various homeschool categories. These categories include topics such as: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, peer influence, student-teacher relationships, family support, and self-efficacy.

Procedure

The various families which will be used in the study will be contacted in order to receive permission to conduct the study. These contacts will be reached through electronic means to ask permission to participate in the study. Once permission is granted and letters of consent have been returned, the survey/interview time will be administered/set up to the qualifying families. Through the use of both the informed consent document, as well as verbal instructions, participants will be informed that their data will be kept anonymous and confidential. Questionnaire administration and its completion will be monitored by the supervising teacher.

Research Questions

RQ 1: What do homeschooling parents feel are important teaching strategies for their children?

RQ 2: What are the reasons why parents have decided to homeschool their children?

RQ 3: What are the most important aspects of a homeschool curriculum?

RQ 4: How does a homeschooling family help a homeschooled student interact socially with their peers?

RQ 5: How do parents balance work/home life if they work as well as educate their children?

RQ 6: How do parents balance work/home life if they work as well as educate their children?

Data Analysis

Narrative analysis will have to be used as qualitative measures are being implemented rather than quantitative methods. The data will be analyzed for patterns of language and behavior that provide insight into the homeschool family's concerns and functions. Once identified, these patterns will be described carefully and in great detail. A greater emphasis will be placed on the holistic description of homeschooled families that provides descriptions in thick, rich detail that has been gleaned from observations, interviews, and surveys collected.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to focus on attitudes/practices/techniques/strategies that appear in several different homeschooled families that could help point to a commonality that other parents could point to as a necessary factor for a successful homeschooled student. The research questions will cover the following questions:

RQ 1: What do homeschooling parents feel are important teaching strategies for their children?

RQ 2: What are the reasons why parents have decided to homeschool their children?

RQ 3: What are the most important aspects of a homeschool curriculum?

RQ 4: How does a homeschooling family help a homeschooled student interact socially with their peers?

RQ 5: How do parents balance work/home life if they work as well as educate their children?

Chapter 4 will be organized in sections covering Data Collection, Study Results, and a summary:

Data Collection:

The timeframe for data collection consisted over several days of interviews with parents of homeschool families. The recruitment that went into the acquisition of homeschool

participants involved reaching out to local connections and word of mouth recommendations. The response rates for all homeschooled parents was 100% as I reached out to them individually. There were no discrepancies in data collection from the plan presented in Chapter 3. The families interviewed were from middle to lower class families. Both families interviewed were caucasian with multiple children. All families were Christian in religion and had both a mother and father present in the family. There were no step-children or step-parents, and all the children were biological, with no foster or adopted children.

Study Results: Several trends emerged when the survey and interview data was analyzed.

Table 1 Demographic Age Profile of Homeschooled Students

College	High School	Middle School	Elementary School
25	18	13	6
23	15	12	5
22	14		5

21			
20			

All 13 of the homeschooled students had been homeschooled for the entirety of their lives. The average age of the college age students was 22.2 years old. Three of the college age homeschooled students continued to remain in the home, while the other two went off to college at a “brick and mortar” institution. Not all research questions applied to the parents of the homeschooled students, but several research questions showed overlap.

Summary:

The following will provide a quick summary of the answers to the research questions from both homeschooled families. The purpose of the research questions given as an oral survey to the parents provided the researcher a way to find correlations and similar strategies used by the two families.

RQ1: What do homeschooling parents feel are important teaching strategies for their children?

Family 1 explained that he believed children “learn a lot through play” and wanted his children to play as a form of learning. Family 1 parent explained that he had “a sense of protecting their childhood” and would let his daughter go out and play for hours in a field. Family 2 also believed in a form of play and did not have any specific “teaching strategies” but allowed their children to participate in activities they enjoyed.

RQ2: What are the reasons why parents have decided to homeschool their children?

Both parents from both families had negative experiences in their schooling growing up.

Family 1 parent explained that “I have not wanted them to feel the same anxiety and stress that I felt” in regards to his schooling.

RQ3: What are the most important aspects of a homeschool curriculum?

Both parents didn't put as much emphasis on curriculum and more focused on how their children were learning. Both families used online curriculum. Family 1 used “Homeschool Plan It” and Family 2 used “Study.Com” online school for their children.

RQ4: What motivates a homeschooled student to perform well academically?

Both parents explained that their children focused on things they liked to do and were more intrinsically motivated. An example would be the children from Family 1 that took part in horse riding and violin lessons.

RQ5: How does a homeschooling family help a homeschooled student interact socially with their

Peers?

Both families interacted socially through their church but kept most of their interactions within their immediate family environments.

RQ6: How do parents balance work/home life if they work as well as educate their children?

Both families worked from home and neither parents needed to leave their homes to do their work. Family 1 the parents were self-employed and had their own business, Family 2 ran an event center and lived in the same place where they did their business. The homeschooled children were mostly left to complete their work on their own with little

help from the parents (the exception being the very young children which were more “hands on” with their learning as seen from Family 2).

Chapter 5

Findings

Summary of the Findings

The findings from the data analysis showed that the homeschooling parents interviewed identified their students' desires and strengths, and then catered to those strengths and desires. One question in particular had similar responses among both homeschooled families in regards to the reasons why parents decided to homeschool their children. Research Question 2 asked parents "What are the reasons why parents have decided to homeschool their children?" and both parents interviewed answered similarly. The first parent interviewed expressed how he grew up attending a preparatory school. The parent from family 1 found the environment to be challenging and difficult. The parent from family 1 later went on to public school where he attended for just one day. The parent explained that he was ahead of them (the other students) "in studies and behaviorally" and "found everyone [to be] really disrespectful to teachers". The parent of family 2 had similar experiences with her educational experience that led to her homeschooling her children. The parent from family 2 explained how there was "peer pressure and negative friend drama" that caused this parent to have an overall negative experience academically. Both parents desired to teach their children about religious matters as well and raise them "in the ways of the Lord" in the words of the second parent interviewed. Another strong correlation arose with both parents explaining how they homeschooled their children and relates to RQ 3, "What are the most important aspects of a homeschool curriculum?". The first parent explained a typical day in their

home for their children. The first parent first thought he had to replicate the public school model, but had to have a “mental adjustment” to that concept. The parent then devised a “piecemeal curriculum” that catered to the needs and desires of his children. This parent also expressed how his “kids love to read” so it wasn’t difficult to incorporate that into the curriculum. The parent also explained how he only tested them once a year. The parent explained that this was beneficial as proved it by saying how his older son tests 2-3 years ahead and his daughters are on their grade level. The parent explained that he’d always told his children they could go back to school if they wanted, but they liked the independence they had as homeschooled children. The first parent explained that he was very “hands off” as it relates to teaching and acted more as a “facilitator” than a teacher. The first parent used “Homeschool Plan it” to “teach” which is a software that emails lessons to his children. The first parent was quick to say that they were not “unschooled”, and did provide a structure of 3 hours of homework that was supposed to be done at the beginning of each day. The first parent also addressed RQ 4 talking about the social aspect. The first parent explained how his son had a community of people he interacted with “at the stables” since he competed in horse riding. The first parent’s daughter also had violin lessons once a week and the whole family utilized a local community center to participate with other families and children regularly. Similarities arose with the interview and survey completed with the second parent. The second parent from the different homeschooled family talked about how they, as a homeschooled family, were not “unschooled” but probably fell “somewhere in the middle”. The second parent said that they were “maybe more unschooled depending on

the day". The second parent explained that her elementary age children were much more "hands on" with their learning and she focused on "what they are interested in" in their education. The second parent also touched on RQ 4 (involving social interaction) and referenced the many animals they had. The parent explained that taking care of the animals was educational, along with tending the garden they had and participating in chemistry lessons in the kitchen. The second parent believed that young children should not be reading until they are 10 because "their eyes were still developing". The second parent explained that she allowed reading to come naturally for her children which was different from the first family interviewed.

Interpretation of Findings

The main goal of this study was to answer the question regarding whether or not certain attitudes/practices/techniques/strategies that appear in several different homeschooled families that could help point to a commonality that other parents could point to as a necessary factor for a successful homeschooled student. Several trends emerged from the interviews and surveys given to both homeschool families in the collection of data for this research. The data collection instruments were parent surveys, and interviews. The findings described above confirm the literature featured in chapter 2.

The first trend connected with research presented in chapter 2. The research presented in chapter 2 found that "the home environment can be a place for "optimal learning" as it provides an environment where there is a lot of flexibility in terms of curriculum and the parents institute "highly individualized [programs], involving both homemade and purchased curriculum materials" (Bell & Kaplan, 2016)". This

environment, where flexibility was emphasized in the interviews and surveys completed by both homeschooled families, was clearly shown through the data collected from both families. Family 1 explained how their children were allowed to complete their homework at their own pace and provided instruction that catered to their personal interests. This correlated with Family 2 who “did not push” their children to read until the children were at least 10 years of age. Family 2 also considered themselves fairly “unschooled” in their teaching and encouraged children to pursue what interested them rather than imposing a strict program that the children were required to complete. The case that “optimal learning” was taking place within the environment relies upon the responses made by the parents who detailed how their students were excelling in their students both in and outside the homeschooling environment.

The second trend that arose came from the way curriculum was used in teaching their homeschooled children. In the research done in chapter 2, Hirsh explains how, historically, homeschooling was either a “yes” or “no” option that relegated parents into choosing two strict options with not a lot of diversity in how content was taught. The advent of the internet and the meteoric rise of homeschooling in the United States has birthed a whole new realm of options for homeschooling families when it comes to how parents choose to homeschool their children (Hirsh, 2019). The involvement that can now be customized around homeschooling families in various ways including using: online resources, co-ops, district extracurricular participation, homeschool assistance programs and microschools (Hirsh, 2019). Family 2 explained how she was so thankful for the amount of resources that were available to homeschool families on the internet.

Both homeschool families interviewed used online resources to teach their children that allowed them to customize their involvement and either be more “hands on” or less so, depending on the needs and ages of the students.

The third trend arose around the concept of the homeschooling environment. As both families mentioned how they both were not considered “unschooled” another term called “unstructured” could be used to apply to both homeschool families interviewed. As seen in the research in chapter 2, “Unstructured”, as the name implies, refers to the approach parents take that places student interest as the most important criteria for homeschooling and the desires of the learner supersede the desires of the parent in relation to what is studied (Guterman & Neuman, 2018). Both families chose to “mix and match” their curriculum to fit the needs of their children that aligns with the “unstructured” model seen from the research. Further research seen from chapter 2 shows that “few homeschooling families adhere exclusively to either of these dichotomous divisions. In fact, the contrary seems true. The trend today appears to be a mix-and-match approach, based on the needs of the parents who choose homeschooling. Each family combines the principles it favors to guide its development of a process that fits the specific children and parents (Guterman & Neuman, 2018). This final trend seen in both families showed that the benefits of internet resources, combined with the desire to cater to the desires of their children, aided parents in forming a homeschool environment that helped create an “unstructured” environment.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study include the sample size of the participants, and the diversity of the sample size used in the data collection. The researcher only used two families and used a small sample size due to the amount of homeschooled children (13 total between both families). Both families were American although one family lived abroad in Spain. Both interviews took place over the internet as social distancing measures were put in place due to a global virus restricting visits to the families. Reliability in the study indicated that the consistency of the data collection was reliable to a degree as the same survey was used in both interviews and the same research questions were used across the board. The measures used to evaluate both families were consistent although responses varied as they depended on personal experience and the decisions made by the parents.

Recommendations

1. Future research should include more participants to increase the sample size so as to gain a better picture of homeschooling in America and not only analyze correlating strategies among low to middle class American families.
2. Future research should interview not only parents but students of homeschool families in order to get an “insider” perspective into the curriculum, their thoughts on schooling, and further elaborate on how homeschooling impacts students both academically and personally.
3. Future research should include research questions that go more in-depth about curriculum and how the types of curriculum used and implemented affect student performance once in college.

Conclusions

The results from this study show that there are several correlating factors among homeschool families that may help the homeschooled student succeed academically. As seen in the responses from the parents through the interview and survey questions, the homeschooling environment, customization of curriculum, and structure of the homeschool were all aspects of homeschooling families that shared similarities. While there were study limitations in terms of sample size and diversity, the study found that there were distinct attitudes/practices/techniques/strategies that appeared among the different homeschooled families that help point to commonalities that may contribute to the success of a homeschooled student.

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