

VARIED TRENDS OF HOMESCHOOLING IN BANGALORE

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Abstract

Schooling is considered to be a very important and essential part of a child's life. Most people in India look at and believe that school education is confined to either a government or a private school. This however has been changing over recent years and many parents have started looking at alternative ways of schooling that break the barriers of conventional methods of schooling and teaching, which focuses more on textbook learning and exams rather than on experiential learning that emphasizes critical thinking and problem solving. While alternative schools have been in existence in India for several years and have only become more popular over the years, another form of schooling that has started gaining interest and is becoming popular in India over the past couple of years has been homeschooling (Bhalla, 2018a).

The focus of this study is to get a deeper understanding of the concept of homeschooling and the reasons for doing so in the Indian context and also to understand the impact of homeschooling on parents and children who are homeschooled in India. The study also seeks to analyze the Right to Education (RTE) Act on homeschooling and the impact that it has on homeschooled children and their future prospects.

Research Questions

1. What are the curricula that are used by parents in teaching children who are homeschooled?
2. Is socialization a cause of worry for homeschoolers? How does socialization happen in a homeschool setting?
3. How does the Right to Education Act effect or have an impact on the homeschooling concept in India? What are parents' views on this issue?
4. How does homeschooling have an impact on parents and homeschooled children?

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Literature Review

Introduction

Homeschooling has always been a popular method of schooling children in the West where many parents traditionally educated their children at home. This has led to a larger number of children being homeschooled than the overall number of students attending charter and voucher schools in America (Bauman, 2001). Homeschooling has slowly started gaining popularity in India as well. While the number of schools and school going children has been increasing over the years in India, there have also been a growing number of parents who do not believe in the traditional schooling system and have therefore been looking for alternative forms of education. Homeschooling is one such alternative and has been on the rise in the country over the past couple of years with more and more parents seeking to homeschool their children. Some of the common beliefs of homeschooling are that it is a form of schooling where children are educated full time at home by parents, guardians or tutors instead of an external place, like a government or public schools (Lips and Feinberg, 2008). John Holt however believes that one of the important aspects of homeschooling that makes it different from other schools is that it is not a school at all but is instead a home which is one of the most important places of a person's life. He is of the opinion that educators should stop trying to make places of learning more like schools but instead focus on making them more like homes because homes are an integral part of society that one cannot imagine living without (Holt, 1981).

Reasons for Homeschooling

The decision of parents to homeschool their children is a result of a number of carefully thought out reasons. The primary reason to homeschool children is because parents have lost faith in the system of public and private schools and the type and quality of education that has been imparted in the past by these schools. A common belief about homeschooling is that it began due to religious reasons by conservative Christian families in the West in order to impart religious education to their children. However, the ironic reality of the homeschooling movement is that it started off in the mid-century as a liberal movement because many people then believed that schools were imparting a very rigorous conservative education and therefore wanted a change to a more liberal form of education (Romanowski, 2006). The desire for a liberal education was nevertheless replaced by conservative education due to many conservative parents being unhappy with the ways in which the prayers and Bible readings were being conducted in schools (Romanowski, 2006). This led to many conservative families removing their children from formal government schools and homeschooling them instead.

Van Galen (1988) was of the opinion that parents who homeschool their children could be put into two broad divisions named as ‘ideologues and pedagogues’. The ideologues have strong religious values and beliefs and criticize the public schools for not instilling religious values in children through their curricula. Hence, these parents prefer to teach their children at home with the intention to safeguard and protect their children’s religious development. Pedagogues on the other hand do not have a problem with the content of what is being taught in schools but instead are of the belief that all that is being taught in school is lacking in many areas. These parents strongly believe that their children would reap the benefits of quality education and learn better if their creativity and intellectual capabilities would be tapped into, through good pedagogical methods and this can be achieved only by homeschooling children (Galen, 1988, Romanowski, 2006).

In India, the homeschooling movement is gaining more and more acceptance by the parent community with a lot more parents opting to homeschool their children instead of sending them to the traditional schools. The reasons for parents to educate children at home in India are not very different from that of the western countries which mostly are because of concerns regarding the school environment, dissatisfaction with the curriculum and the teaching methods and practices and with the morals and values that are currently being imparted in schools (Gorder, 1987). (Elassery, 2008) believes that one of the biggest problems in the Indian education system is that it focuses on increasing knowledge which is of no use to a student when they start working. This is one of the reasons why many youth in the country are unemployed and the ones that are employed need extensive training before they can do their jobs (Elassery, 2008). Another common reason among parents is that of the schooling environment which is way too competitive and thus ends up killing children’s curiosity. In schools, all the children are expected to do things in a certain way and everything is based on creating something that is perfect. Different methods and ways of learning are not encouraged in most of our schools (Joseph, 2018). John Holt in his book, *How Children Fail* has written that one of the main reasons that children don’t do well in schools is because of ‘fear’ and this fear is instilled in the schools. He believed that human beings are animals whose innate ability is to learn and nobody needs to teach a person how to do this but the reason why learning is hindered is because other people try to interfere with the process by bringing in rules and by controlling it (Holt, 1964).

There are several different reasons that lead one to the decision of homeschooling but one of the key things to be kept in mind is that when

parents make this choice, they make an informed choice and a commitment to being fully involved in their child's learning and development and therefore play a much greater role in their children's learning (Saghir, 2008).

Choosing Curricula in Homeschooling

A large number of homeschooling parents believe that they are able to provide a much better foundation in academics for their children than what is being provided in schools. Children are all different and therefore also learn differently. Every child has a different learning style and schools do not cater to the diverse learning needs of children. Most parents who educate their children at home understand and believe in letting their children explore their own learning styles and also give them the freedom to learn at their own pace, which is seldom provided in regular schools (Saghir, 2008). Schools are supposed to be places where children from diverse backgrounds come together and create a space where everyone is treated equally. However, the hidden curriculum that is often a part of every school ends up creating more inequalities in society, rather than creating equality (Van Galen, 1988).

Homeschooling parents have the freedom to choose the curricula that their children should or could learn and can even create their own curricula as they are not forced to follow any set formal curriculum. Homeschooled children who wish to receive a school degree are eligible to write the NIOS or the IGCSE board exams when they reach the 10th or 12 grade (Banerjee, 2013). While there are a lot of parents that prefer following certain set curricula, there are also parents that do not believe in degrees and certificates and instead let their children choose their own paths based on their interests. This is known as unschooling, where parents let their children explore and learn by themselves based on their natural instincts. Parents, who believe in the unschooling path, believe that children have an innate ability to learn and hence should be encouraged to explore and find out what they are interested in by themselves instead of adults making those decisions for them (Sinha, 2016).

While some parents like to follow a single curriculum while teaching their children there are also quite a few parents that like to prepare their own curriculum, based on different curricula that are available and that best suit their child's interests and needs. A few parents use a mix of ICSE, CBSE and IGCSE curricula along with other resources such as the Oxford publications to create curricula of their own (Raj, 2017). Many homeschoolers in India also use the Waldorf and Cambridge systems which focus on understanding the application of things in the practical world rather than on just rote learning. The Waldorf methods of learning focuses on helping the child learn through

their creativity and imagination. They use stories, songs, theatre and many more creative forms of learning to spark children's creativity and imagination (Raj, 2017).

Socialization aspects and common beliefs of homeschooling

While there are many reasons leading to parents' decision in homeschooling their children, the number of students being homeschooled in the West and in India has only been increasing over the years. This is an indicator that many parents have been accepting of the idea of homeschooling children.

Notwithstanding this, there are also quite a few critics of the whole idea of homeschooling. One of the most common criticisms of the concept of homeschooling is that of the socialization aspect of children who are homeschooled. Many people believe that children who are homeschooled do not get enough exposure to the outside society and are lacking when it comes to social skills and therefore find it difficult to get along with others in society. One of the arguments for this belief is that schools are the only places where children get exposure to the real world and no other form of schooling can teach this skill to children; homeschooling therefore leads to creating 'misfits' in society (Romanowski, 2006).

The term socialization refers to various different things by different people. Some people refer to socialization as a manner in which children interact with their peers through games and extracurricular activities while others believe that socialization is a process by which children are exposed to the various cultural beliefs and norms in society that equip them to gain entry into and become a part of society (Romanowski, 2006). Contrary to many beliefs, Romanowski was of the opinion that homeschooling parents very well understand the importance of socialization for their children and are therefore constantly trying to create an environment and opportunities for their children to involve themselves with various activities where they can interact with their peers and other people in the society that they are very much a part of (Romanowski, 2006). Ellassery (2008) is of the opinion that the socialization problem that most critics are worried about is not as big a worry as is often made out to be. Schools are definitely great places for children to interact with each other. However, in schools children often tend to interact with others who are similar to them and are of the same age group. Homeschooled children have an advantage here as they are taught the 'art of interaction' by none other than their parents themselves (Ellassery, 2008).

Many homeschooling parents believe that the kind of socialization that is currently happening in schools causes more harm than good. In schools, children are divided into different groups based on their age, academics and learning abilities.

Children that do not learn at the same pace and style as the other children are often shamed and punished and children who are different from others are not encouraged in a classroom. All this leads to creating a very unhealthy environment for a child to grow up in (Mazumdar, 2016). John Holt believes that the one place that children would not learn any good form of socialization is in schools. He is of the opinion that children can learn how to interact with others and learn about different cultures and diverse groups of people by being a part of community gatherings and schools are not required for this. Instead of schools making children learn more about themselves and their identity and the unique nature and diversity of other individuals, they make children doubt themselves and end up creating insecure individuals who end up looking down on others whom they consider to be weaker than themselves. The majority of the children who do not go to school end up treating others with much more respect and dignity and find no need to despise others as they grow up to have a much stronger sense of self worth and confidence (Holt,1981).

The RTE and Legality regarding Homeschooling in India

While homeschooling has been legalized by many countries in the West by creating certain laws that recognize children who are being homeschooled, this has however not been the case so far in India. In the year 2009, the Right to Education Act was passed, which made education free and compulsory for all children between the age groups of six to fourteen years of age in India. The Act however, recognized schools only as an external place and not as a home or anywhere else, apart from a recognized school. The Act made no provision or mention of children who are being schooled at home. Many parents are of the opinion that the RTE act has restricted schooling to only a particular type of schools and has therefore threatened the very existence of any other forms of schooling. Therefore many parents believe that the Act was not a Right to Education but was instead a Right to Schooling (Bhalla, 2018b).

Due to several homeschooling parents' concerns regarding the legality of homeschooling, the Times of India in 2010 carried an article by Kapil Sibal, the then HRD Minister, on his views on the RTE Act with regard to homeschooling. To quote from the newspaper article:

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009 wants every child to be in school, but if somebody decides not to send his/her children to school, we are not going to interfere. The compulsion is on the state, not on the parents. Parents are free not to send their children to school, but teach them at home. We cannot be micromanaging, Sibal told TOI on Tuesday. The Act stipulates eight years of formal education for all children between 6 and 14 years of age. Homeschooling parents believe in individual skills

and want to nurture them in their children at home rather than in schools. The Act, outlining the duties of the parents, says “It shall be the duty of every parent or guardian to admit or cause to be admitted his or her child or ward, as the case may be, to an elementary education in the neighbourhood school” (Chakravorty & Bajaj, 2018).

While this statement did give some sort of relief to homeschooling parents, the problem arose when no formal version of this statement could be found online and the same is the case even today. A homeschooled student, Sherya Sahai, petitioned the court regarding the matter of legalizing homeschooling but was directed by the court to approach the government instead. The government in the past has stated that homeschoolers were free to homeschool their children but they were not looking at legalizing homeschooling yet (Vidyut, 2013).

Homeschooling parents and children come into another problem with the RTE act with the certification of education that is provided to homeschooled children. Most children who are homeschooled take the NIOS exam which is recognized by the Indian Government as equal to a certificate provided by any other school in order to seek higher education or job opportunities. However, due to the RTE act regarding elementary education, the NIOS initially decided to discontinue the Open Basic Education Program (OBEP) for all children between the ages of six to fourteen years of age after 2013. The NIOS however has kept extending the OBEP program, first till 2017 and now till 2020, due to the success of many students in the program (Bhalla, 2018b).

The lack of any legality surrounding homeschooling leads to many students facing difficulties while applying to colleges and getting accepted into institutions of their choice. Even though assurances have been given in the past by the government regarding parents’ choice to homeschool their children, parents believe that till the government makes a provision for homeschooling in writing, there is absolutely no guarantee and a day may come when different forms of schooling will become illegal and action will be taken (Vidyut, 2013).

Although the legal aspects of homeschooling in India is blurry, parents who believe in homeschooling are of the opinion that their children’s freedom in learning is of the utmost importance and therefore they will continue to homeschool their children until such time as they see fit, as they believe that presently it is the best option available for their children (Vidyut, 2013).

Impact of Homeschooling on Parents and Children

Many homeschooling parents, while strongly agreeing to the advantages and benefits of homeschooling with respect to their children, also often believe that homeschooling takes up a lot of their time and is a full time commitment. Many a time it is hard to separate homeschooling from life. Parents' lives generally revolve around their homeschooled children, their learning, activities, food, interests and many more such things (Rochelle, 2016). A majority of the time gets dedicated to homeschooling and therefore there is a shift in lifestyle for many families. Homeschooling parents end up spending even more time with their children than what most other parents usually do, which leads to all other activities, chores, passions that are not concerning their children to generally take a backseat and parents end up getting lesser time for themselves (Calvert).

While there are many who believe that homeschooling parents have to give up their careers and passion, there are also a number of homeschoolers who believe that this is often a myth and instead are of the opinion that homeschooling parents can do both – manage their careers as well as homeschool their children (Chakravorty & Bajaj, 2018). Although it does seem difficult, there are many homeschooling parents who are managing to do both of these and believe that in this way they get to earn a decent living along with providing their children with individual attention that helps meet their educational needs as well.

Most children who are homeschooled do not follow the same timings as that of a regular school. The number of hours that a child usually ends up spending in a regular school is longer because the day is divided into a number of things including assembly, transition period, playtime and lunch and therefore they end of spending most of their day in school. This however is not the case in homeschooling as children usually begin their day early in the morning and complete their studies by lunch time as they get individual attention and are therefore more focused. Vanderkam is of the opinion that “one-on-one teaching is more efficient” and therefore both parents and children get more time for themselves to do other things (Vanderkam, 2016).

One of the other common myths about homeschooling is that homeschooled children are usually the ones who are weak in learning and need additional help and are therefore taught at home. Another common belief is that homeschooled children find it difficult to take up and pursue professional courses like medicine and engineering (Chakravorty & Bajaj, 2018). Homeschooling in India received much media attention a couple of years back when a boy who stood first in the IIT-JEE examination had been

homeschooled. In a similar case, a seventeen year old homeschooled girl from Mumbai, Malvika Joshi, received admission for a degree program in science to the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) at Boston (Balasubramanyam, 2018).

Homeschooling parents believe that one of the biggest advantages of homeschooling is that children get the time to learn and discover things for themselves at their own pace and also tend to develop a love for knowledge. Children also get an opportunity to pursue a range of different subjects that are of interest to them. Apart from academics, the children are also more inclined towards other vocational activities that are generally not academics related, which gives them an opportunity to follow their passions along with their studies. Homeschooling however is not all fun and games and involves a lot of independence and hard work on the part of the homeschooled children (Gadgil, 2016).

Some people hold the opinion that homeschooling has a few drawbacks when it comes to higher education as sometimes homeschooled children may find it difficult to get along with different types of people in college and may also find it difficult to cope with the work and stress that college brings along with it (Balasubramanyam, 2018). However, the decision to homeschool or not is a decision of the parents and their children and more often than not parents know what's best for their children (Chakravorty & Bajaj, 2018).

Context of the Field Site and Participants

The field site for our research project was Bangalore as we found that there were a large number of homeschooling families that have been homeschooling their children in the city. The participants that we considered for our research study were eight homeschooling families in Bangalore, four of whom followed a certain curriculum and the other four were unschooling their children and therefore did not have any particular curriculum that they followed. The age group of the homeschooling children that we met and whose mothers we interviewed belonged to a wide age group of 4 to 15 years of age.

Research Methodology and Methods

The methodology that we used for our research study was purely qualitative in nature. We mostly made use of the snowball effect to identify and locate our participants where we located one homeschooling family and they led us to more families that were currently homeschooling their children in the city. We wanted to interview a mixed group of homeschooling families in Bangalore who were using different methods and approaches of homeschooling and who were not part of the same homeschooling groups, a lot of which actively exists in the city. However, while interacting

with some of the homeschooling mothers, we realized and were also told by one of the mothers that, “no two homeschooling families have the same approach to homeschooling”. This was something that we also observed while interacting with the parents.

We interviewed eight homeschooling families living in different parts of the city. As we had only two weeks assigned for our research project, we visited one family in a day and spent about two to three hours speaking to the mothers and children and also observed a few of the children while they were learning and engaging in activities. Prior approval and written consent was also taken from the participants.

As we were two of us working on our research project, we divided our work, where I interviewed the mothers and children while my partner took down notes. We used the information that we collected from our interviews and observations and put them under broader themes. Based on our research questions the two of us, through our coding and analysis of the data tried to draw out common patterns that came out while analyzing and coding the data collected.

Observation, Analysis and Findings

The age group of the homeschooling children that we visited was of a large range, starting as young as four and going up to 15 years of age. All except for one of the homes that we visited had two or three children that were being homeschooled together and almost all of the children studying together were siblings. Only one of the families that were homeschooling had three children of the same age group that studied together. This was possible because the homeschooling parent taught her son along with her nephew and his friend who were all eleven and therefore they all studied together, followed the same curriculum and did the same activities together.

Age differences between children mattered when it came to learning and studying together and in most cases all the children had similar schedules but studied and worked on different things depending on their grades and interests. A homeschooling parent said the following about children learning together: “They all study at the same time usually but since there is a big age gap between the three of them and each of them are doing completely different subjects and topics, they don’t study together.” However, there were also a few families where the age gap between siblings was only a year or two and in this case the children sometimes worked together and studied the same topics but almost all the mothers were of the opinion that their children were very different from each other and had different interests and passions. One of the mothers said that “All three of my children are very different, they are

unique in their own way and we don't want them to lose their individuality". Most parents know their children well, but when it comes to homeschooling, the parent's knowledge about their children is way more heightened than otherwise. One of the things that homeschooling parents tend to observe and realize soon is that each of their children are so different from each other and therefore are also able to recognize the deeper differences amongst each of their children and also in their learning styles. This understanding of different learning styles helps parents to better plan their children's learning schedules and activities and also helps parents in creating a more diverse environment that helps meet their children's learning needs (Smith, 2018).

A majority of the homeschooling children, especially the older siblings in almost every household had been in a regular school at some point of time in their lives but were then taken out from school because the parents were not too happy with the way in which education and learning was happening in the schools. Parents who decided to homeschool their older child or children and who had prior experience of homeschooling and its benefits, often made the decision to not send their youngest child to regular and mainstream school and instead homeschooled them right from the beginning, "The younger one has never been to school, really. He has always been homeschooled. By the time he was to go to school I was comfortable with homeschooling and decided to see how this would work with him studying at home with me." Most parents believed that, though the decision to homeschool their children was initially theirs, the final decision was only taken after speaking to their children about their idea of homeschooling and it was only after their children were on board with the idea was when the parents took them out of their schools and started with the process of homeschooling. This was said by one of the mothers, "Before making this decision we knew that we had to speak to our children and see how they felt and what they thought about all of this. My kids were involved in this decision and they have not wanted to go back to school since then."

As mentioned above, Van Galen (1988) divides parents who homeschool their children into 'ideologues and pedagogues'. The ideologues are more religion oriented and the pedagogues are more teaching oriented. I believe that all the eight homeschooling families that we visited were pedagogues as one of the primary reasons that all of them stated for making the decision to homeschool their children was that they were not happy with the ways in which teaching and learning were happening in the schools. Pedagogues according to Van Galen do not have a problem with the content of what is being taught in schools, but instead are of the belief that what is being taught in school is lacking in many areas. These parents strongly believe that their

children would reap the benefits of quality education and learn better if their creativity and intellectual capabilities would be tapped into through good pedagogical methods and this can be achieved only by homeschooling children (Van Galen, 1988).

Many of the homeschooling mothers said that they decided to homeschool their children because they did not understand the reason for putting so much pressure on young children to study. A parent shared the following, “Most of what they study in school is forgotten after sometime and the kids study only to pass their exams. So much unnecessary information is given to them in school. I did not want my kids to miss out on their childhood because of school work and pressure from school and others.” Also the school’s environment is very competitive and ends up killing the natural creativity and curiosity of children (Joseph, 2018). In schools, children barely get enough time to do anything apart from their school work. Therefore another common reason for parents choosing to homeschool their children was to give them time to pursue their other interests and passions apart from just focusing on subject learning.

Curricula

One of the main focus areas of our study was to understand the various curricula that homeschooling parents follow in order to teach their children. 4 out of the 8 families that we met followed a structured curriculum while the other 4 families were unschooling their children. Homeschooling parents have the freedom to choose the curricula that their children can learn from and can even create their own curriculum as they are not forced to follow any set formal curriculum. (Banerjee, 2013) believed that most parents in India that homeschool their children follow the CBSE or the state board curricula. However, the curricula that were followed by all the four families that we interviewed and who followed a particular curriculum were all different from each other. The curricula that were used were the IGCSE, CBSE, ICSE, NIOS and the Waldorf curriculum. Some of the families also followed a mix of different curricula to teach their children depending on their children’s interest areas. The decision of curricula was based on the kind of schools that the children were in previously. Most of the homeschooling families that followed a curriculum made use of the same curricula that their children were familiar with at their previous schools.

One of the families was following the Waldorf curriculum and this was because all the three children had been in a Steiner school setting before and the parents really liked the way in which the curriculum was designed. The Waldorf system focuses on understanding the application of things in

the practical world rather than focusing on just rote learning. The Waldorf methods of learning focuses on helping the child learn through their creativity and imagination (Raj, 2017). There are a number of different activities and subjects that keep getting added at every grade and these activities are clearly mentioned in the curriculum under each grade, “it is a nice mixed bag of everything.” One of the concepts that the curriculum follows is that of “breathing in and breathing out.” Steiner’s idea behind this concept is that in order to survive we need to breathe in and breathe out. Therefore children should also be engaged in learning things that help in both, breathing in and breathing out. The following was shared by one of the mothers “The breathing in activities is mostly academic related like Maths and Science and the breathing out activities that the children were currently involved with are gardening, woodwork, playing the recorder and the violin”. This particular curriculum is very detailed and requires a lot of effort and learning on the teacher’s part as well – “The main reason that my sister and I decided to go with the Waldorf curriculum was also because I was familiar with it since I have taught in a similar school setting and I knew about the curriculum and liked it.”

Some of the homeschooling parents also followed different curricula with each of their children, depending on their children’s area of interests and the subjects offered by certain boards. It is usually in the 8th grade, when children who wish to appear for the IGCSE board exams in their 10th grade have to make a decision on which board they wish to write the exam with and based on this decision they choose their curricula. One of the parents was of the opinion that, the IGCSE curriculum offers subjects that are more mainstream and professional whereas the NIOS board offers a wider variety of subjects to choose from – “The NIOS has about 26 different subjects to choose from and I was surprised to see that their curriculum is very well written and planned”. The children have to compulsorily choose any five of the subjects of their choice based on which they will end up writing their board exam on.

The families that followed a specific curriculum had a more structured daily schedule plan that the children followed. However, these plans were very flexible and mostly revolved around the children’s interests. Most of the children complete their studies by afternoon and they have the rest of the day to pursue other activities that they are interested in. Almost all the homeschooling children that we met were pursuing various activities apart from just their academics. One of the reasons that homeschooling parents believe that this is possible is because the children have the time and flexibility to pursue other interests without having to worry about missing classes,

exams or homework. A homeschooling mother said this, “My elder son is a footballer and he will be travelling to Amsterdam soon for a few months to play a few matches. If he was in school it would have been difficult for him to travel during this time because of the school exams and also because he would be missing his classes. Being homeschooled gives my children a lot of freedom and flexibility in managing their studies and their other activities and interests.”

Many homeschooling families do not believe in following a curriculum and are instead “unschooling” their children. In unschooling, it is the children who decide what they want to study and when, based on their own interests. In the unschooling form of learning, parents let their children explore and learn by themselves based on their natural instincts. Parents, who believe in the unschooling path, believe that children have an innate ability to learn and hence should be encouraged to explore and find out what they are interested in by themselves instead of adults making those decisions for them (Sinha, 2016). It was not like the children who were being unschooled do not learn reading, writing and maths and do not have a schedule. Most of the children who were being unschooled have been to school at some point of time and therefore have learned some basics. However, it is up to them entirely to decide their schedule and what they want to learn.

The unschooling children usually take up very different courses and they learn academic subjects only if it is of interest to them. One of the homeschooling mothers said this, “My son is very interested in gaming, coding and hackathons and for this he requires a lot of maths. He learns maths online through Khan Academy and has already completed the grade 9 maths course and he is 11 now.” Therefore most of the learning that happens takes place through the various activities that children are interested in and are mostly non-academic related. The unschooling children are often self learners and through exploration by reading books, articles and online videos they learn a number of things. One homeschooler shared the following, “I was always interested in making YouTube videos, and made a lot of videos on how to make cosmetics with colour pencils. Through watching YouTube videos I also got into the technical bit of making videos. I learned most of the things about software, especially the editing bit of it because I needed to learn it to edit my own videos.” Many unschooled children also take up short courses on subjects that are of interest to them and work on various activities and interests simultaneously. As shared by a homeschooler, “I did a course on film making from IMI (Institute of Moving Images) and for a few months I did some theatre work also with Anuja Goshangal. I also started to compose music for a short time and have again begun composing music recently.”

More than being teachers, a majority of the homeschooling mothers believe that they are facilitators and help their children whenever help is needed. Many of the mothers are also sometimes very involved in their children's activities and sometimes the children and the mothers work together on a particular activity and both end up learning together. A homeschooling parent shared the following, "When my children are working on clay and woodwork and gardening, I also get to do the same things. I am doing all that they are doing and learning along with them which is what I love the most about homeschooling."

Assessments

All homeschooling children are eligible to write the NIOS and IGCSE 10th and 12th board exams and get their school degrees under these respective boards (Banerjee, 2013). Most of the homeschooling families that we met did not have any particular assessment format or schedule that they followed regularly. Most of the families did not have any assessments and even if assessments were conducted they are done in a very unstructured manner. One of the homeschooling mothers said that, "Most of the time, I know what my children have understood and what they require more help with". Many homeschoolers also made use of the Khan Academy online tests to assess themselves whenever they feel like taking a test, but most parents are of the opinion that they know and are very much aware of their children's learning levels.

Many international schools allow homeschooling children to take their exams along with the exams of their other students and homeschooled children who wish to be assessed can enrol themselves with an international school and take their exams. Another organization that is in the city and that prepares assessments for homeschooling children is Grahashiksha. They prepare assessments for children and send it to their homes and once the children write the test, they provide feedback to the children.

While there are many homeschoolers who plan on taking the NIOS and IGCSE board exams in the 10th grade there are also many children, mostly those who are being unschooled, who do not wish to take any of these exams. They do not believe in certificates and degrees and their focus is more on skill building and learning about those things that are of interest to them. A homeschooling mother shared the following, "We are not worried about certificates and degrees. If my daughter is doing well in something that she is interested in, then I am sure that she can make a career out of that. Here she has so many interests and in the process she is learning so many skills which I am sure will be of help even without any certificates."

Socialization

When it comes to homeschooling, one of the biggest criticisms about it is that children often become ‘awkward and introverts’ and find it difficult to speak to and get along with different kinds of people. Many believe that children who are homeschooled do not get enough exposure to the outside society and are ‘lacking’ when it comes to social skills and therefore find it difficult to get along with others in society (Romanowski, 2006). However while speaking with and interviewing homeschooling families, one of the things that came through very clearly from our interactions was that socialization is not a problem at all and the belief that homeschoolers find it difficult to socialize is a “myth”. Homeschooled children have an advantage as they are taught the ‘art of interaction’ (Elassery, 2008). In fact, almost all the homeschoolers believed that their children get more opportunities to interact with different kinds of people and not just their peers but also people of different age groups because of the exposure that homeschoolers have due to the number of activities that they are involved in. According to a homeschooling mother, “I do not believe that socialization is a problem at all. In fact from what I have seen, I think that the quality of socialization that homeschooling kids get is much better.”

Homeschoolers have the freedom to choose the people they want to speak to and be friends with. No one forces them to be friends with anyone and the decision of interacting with others is up to them entirely. A parent shared the following, “My children interact with not just their peers but also with people of different age groups and they know how to deal with different kinds of people and they have different dynamics with different people. Therefore socialization is not a concern at all.”

Homeschoolers are involved in a number of activities such as theatre, dance, football, squash, music, film making and many more such different activities. Children who are homeschooled are indeed considered to have greater exposure to a wide range of activities and people than regular school going children (Romanowski, 2006). They also take part in a number of competitions and events where they get to meet a number of different kinds of people who may sometimes be very different from them. The following was shared by a homeschooling mother, “My son for the first time took part in a hackathon competition recently in Chennai and won the first prize there. He was one of the youngest participants there but he found it so easy to make friends and have conversations with different people who were much older than him. I myself was surprised to see him interact so easily with so many people.”

A majority of the homeschoolers that we interviewed lived in apartments or gated communities and many of the children's friends who they played with on a daily basis lived in the same apartments. Therefore I believe that children who live in apartments find it easier to socialize and interact with people on a daily basis when compared to homeschoolers that live in independent houses. A parent shared, "we used to live in an apartment before and the children had a lot of friends who they met everyday there. We recently moved to this house and my children haven't yet found any friends here so there isn't too much interaction that is happening with others on a daily basis now and we are working on this." Homeschooling parents very well know the importance of socialization and therefore try their best to provide a diverse learning environment for their children where they regularly get an opportunity to meet other children and interact with them.

Right to Education

As per the Right to Education Act, homeschooling in India is not considered as legal from the government's point of view and has been a cause of worry for many parents. There are a few parents who believe that the right to education act restricted and threatened the existence of any other forms of schooling apart from the regular mainstream schools and therefore believed that it was a right to schooling and not education (Bhalla, 2018b). While all the eight homeschooling mothers that we interviewed believed that it would be good if the government legalized homeschooling, many of them were also of the opinion that the right to education act was not a bad act and it was intended for a completely different audience. A homeschooling mother said the following, "I have read the whole RTE document carefully and I agree that it is not a bad act and is helpful to many children."

The parents believed that homeschooling is not legal but it is not illegal as well and as long as it is not made illegal they are okay with the way things are for now. There are a number of parents who have been working towards getting homeschooling legalized and many homeschoolers are working on this slowly and carefully as they do not want to push the government or anyone else for that matter to take any drastic decision. "Silence in this case is not a very bad thing because as soon as a lot of us make noise and demand for recognition, chances are that it will become illegal. So as long as nothing is said and it is neither illegal nor legal, the middle ground is okay for us as of now." When many of the homeschoolers wrote to Kapil Sibal regarding the right to education not having mentioned anything about homeschooling in India, he said that (as quoted by a parent), "the RTE was targeted towards a completely different population of the society and not the elite. "What the elite do with their children is not our concern as of now."

A few homeschooling parents were also of the opinion that it is difficult to make homeschooling completely legal because then homeschooling would have to have a structure and most homeschooling families in India follow very different ways and methods of homeschooling. Many higher institutes of study and scholarships for the same require some sort of certification of education of children. The lack of any legality surrounding homeschooling leads to many students facing difficulties while applying to colleges and getting accepted into institutions of their choice (Vidyut, 2013). However, during our interviews with parents and children, many of the mothers were of the opinion that more people have become aware about homeschooling now, at least in the bigger cities and many educational institutions have also started recognizing and accepting homeschoolers to their institutions. A homeschooling parent said the following, “When my elder daughter completed her 10th grade we applied to many colleges and all of them seemed to know about homeschooling and were interested to know more about it. They were very open to speaking to her and she also got accepted to many colleges but she decided to continue with homeschooling under the NIOS board”.

While all the parents hope that homeschooling becomes legal and is recognized by the government, not many of them are too worried about the legal aspects of homeschooling. One parent said that, “We’ll cross the bridge when the time comes.” For now, most of the parents were okay with not having anything being said about homeschooling as this has not affected them or their children and they are still free to homeschool their children in the way that is of theirs and their children’s choice. They are happy with the way things are at least for now and if homeschooling becomes illegal then they would take immediate action.

Impact of Homeschooling on Parents and Children

Contrary to my own belief, and to my pleasant surprise, 6 out of the 8 homeschooling mothers that we interviewed were working mothers and were managing to homeschool their children along with following their own interests and passions. One of the homeschooling mothers shares her experience with relation to this, “I have worked almost all my life. Even while I was homeschooling in the beginning it wasn’t like I had to give up on the things that I like to do in order to teach my kids. I have always continued with my work and the boys’ education and interests all revolve around my work. I couldn’t expect my children to follow their passion and interests if I myself was not doing what I love.”

Most of the homeschooling working mothers were working from home on most days so that they were able to be with their children as well as work

on their own interests. They believe that it was possible for them to work as well as homeschool their children due to the flexibility of homeschooling. The children generally finish their work and studies by afternoon which gives the homeschooling mother's time in the evening to work and pursue their passions.

All eight of the homeschooling mothers that we met really enjoyed homeschooling their children and one of the things that all of the mothers absolutely loved the most about homeschooling was the amount of time that they got to spend with their children that has made the bond that they share much stronger. This was shared by one of the mothers, "I love the amount of time I get to spend with him. I really seem to know my son and it's only because of the time I get to spend with him. We have a very good relationship with each other and there is a lot of trust that we share. I wouldn't have been able to have such a strong bond with my son and found out about his strengths if he was not homeschooled."

Most of the homeschooling mothers are very involved with their children's learning and are often learning new things along with their children. One of the homeschooling mother's that we interviewed and interacted with shared her experiences of homeschooling her son and learning along with him. Her son is very interested in gaming and coding and because of his interest in designing games; she also got introduced to designing and coding while working along with her son on designing games. Therefore while their children are involved in activities and learning new things, many homeschooling parents are also getting involved with their children's learning and are in turn learning a number of new things themselves.

The main focus of homeschooling has been on the children and most of the homeschooled children believe that homeschooling has given them the freedom and flexibility to follow their passions and pursue the things that they love doing. A homeschooled child shared the following, "I have always been more interested in making videos, and in theatre and music and being unschooled has given me the time to learn and do the things that I am interested in. I am also learning how to play a few different instruments now and have also started composing music recently."

Discussions on Key Findings

While interviewing homeschooling parents and later analyzing my data, one of the findings that I found very interesting and would like to work on further is the impact that homeschooling in India has on the parents and children. While there are many who believe that homeschooling parents have to give up their careers and passion, there are also a number of homeschoolers who

believe that this is often a myth and instead are of the opinion that homeschooling parents can both, manage their careers along with homeschooling their children just fine (Chakravorty & Bajaj, 2018). I was pleasantly surprised to find out that there were many homeschooling mothers who were managing to homeschool their children as well as manage their work and would like to research and know more about working homeschooling mothers and see if homeschooling plays a role in influencing parent's choice of work.

Another area that is of keen interest to me and that I would like to research further is the influence and effect of homeschooling on homeschoolers that have completed their 12th grade and under-graduation. I would like to understand the influence that homeschooling has had on their career choices and how open are companies in hiring homeschooled children. There has been an increase in the number of employers and businesses who have started hiring more and more homeschooled children to their companies because they are of the belief that children who are homeschooled are passionate to learn along with being very skilled. They believe that homeschoolers are eager, hardworking, driven and smart and have a high level of loyalty (Klicka, 2005). While speaking with one of the homeschooling mothers she said that, "Many companies have begun to accept students as short term interns which help in gaining skill-based exposure. I think that companies also now are looking for people with skill more than looking for certificates and degrees." There are many homeschoolers in the city who are doing short term courses and who are also interning with many companies while being homeschooled. I would like to document older children's perspectives on being homeschooled and the career choices that are available to them. I believe that this would give me a better understanding of the relationship between homeschooled children and their future aspirations and career choices in India.

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