

Comparison of Preferred Didactic Forms and Methods in Homeschooling

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Abstract

The research dealt with opinions of homeschooling parents on preferred homeschooling methods and forms. Using the questionnaire method, it mapped opinions of 78 parents from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland. It examined the influence of selected variables, i.e. age of parents and number of homeschooled children, on the preference for methods and forms of education. On the basis of research findings it could be stated that younger respondents preferred unschooling more than older respondents. The older respondents, on the other hand, preferred classical teaching methods and forms more. It was also found that the number of homeschooled children had no influence on parents' choice of homeschooling methods and forms.

Key words: *homeschooling, homeschooling methods and forms, parents of homeschooled children, classical homeschooling methods and forms.*

Introduction

The process of education, not only in European countries, involves various factors which are often the result of the current situation in the education system of the country. For instance, parents' dissatisfaction with the school system, an effort for their children to achieve better study results, a desire to provide better conditions for the moral and ethical development of their children, discontent with the curriculum, teaching methods or value orientation of the school, religious

reasons, living in a remote rural settlement, various health issues of the children, or specific giftedness may be reasons why parents consider homeschooling their children. Although Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Poland are countries where education is perceived mainly as an institutionalized process, in these countries, it is also legal to homeschool children.

Homeschooling is currently perceived as a trend¹ that came to Europe from the United States in the second half of the 20th century. Pioneers of homeschooling include e. g. Holt (1964, 1967, 2003), Moore, R. S. & Moore, D. N. (1975), Griffith (1997), Gaither (2008), Illich (2002), and Gray (20013).

Holt (1964, 1967, 2003) analyzed specific situations from his teaching experience, based on which he argued that there is no need to force children to learn – they would naturally learn on their own when ready to if given freedom to be led by their own interests and if they have a wide range of resources to learn from. Similarly, Gray (2013) described experience gained during many years of his research into children's self-education, starting with the self-education of hunters and gatherers in primitive tribes, and the self-education of children at Sudbury Valley School, Massachusetts.

Illich (2002) declared his belief that school should be separated from society. According to him, the school had an “anti-educational” effect on society. He maintained that instead of school, there should be free education as a natural, spontaneous, completely voluntary activity stemming from the child's interests.

While in the United States there are about 2.3 million homeschooled pupils, which is about 8% of all pupils (Ray, 2019), in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, respectively, homeschooling is opted for only by parents of 0.3% of all pupils (Mazur, Rochovská & Klačková 2019); however, this number is tending to rise. For instance, in the last five years the number of homeschooled children increased from 70 to 579 in Slovakia, from 1038 to 3232 in the Czech Republic and from 2699 to 11466 in Poland (Rochovská, Mazur & Dolinská, 2019).

In Slovakia and the Czech Republic research produced the same results as in the United States (e. g. Murphy, 2014; Gray & Rile, 2013; Cogan, 2010; Ray & Weller, 2003), where research confirmed that homeschooled children scored as well as their school attending peers in college entrance examinations. Slovak homeschooled children achieved very good results in their final examinations at the end of the school year. Similarly, experimental verification of homeschooling

¹ Nevertheless, homeschooling is nothing new; it is basically the oldest form of education. As written by Kašparová (2019), it is as old as humanity itself; however, replaced by a mass unified education system mainly for ideological reasons.

in the Czech Republic showed that it was, in all aspects, a valid alternative to the state institutionalized education system (Kašparová, 2019; Pastorová, Altmanová & Koubek, 2012).

The concern about homeschooling is of current interest in consideration of the current pandemic situation. Therefore, opinions and attitudes of the public may change in favour of homeschooling, which is why it is important to study it from various perspectives. The aim of this research was to study selected didactic aspects of homeschooling in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Poland. It was not focused on the goals and content of homeschooling, because they are prescribed by the state and given in the curricular documents of the respective countries (Rochovská, Mazur, 2019; Rochovská, Mazur, Dolinská, 2019), but this study dealt particularly with issues related to the process of homeschooling – methods and forms (Table 1).

Table 1. Methods and forms preferred by parents of homeschooled children (Rochovská, Mazur & Dolinská, 2019)

	Respondents' responses	PL		CZ		SK		Total	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
M ethods	Unschooling	7	9.86	9	18.75	8	15.69	24	14.12
	Working with a textbook	9	12.68	4	8.33	2	3.92	15	8.82
	Reading, writing, speaking	8	11.27	1	2.08	5	9.80	14	8.24
	Projects	6	8.45	2	4.17	4	7.84	12	7.06
	Working with a workbook	3	4.23	3	6.25	3	5.88	9	5.29
	Plays	4	5.63	2	4.17	2	3.92	8	4.71
	Experiential learning	3	4.23	1	2.08	4	7.84	8	4.71
	Experiments, discovering	2	2.82	2	4.17	2	3.92	6	3.53
	Working with the Internet	3	4.23	0	0.00	1	1.96	4	2.35
	Watching films and videos	2	2.82	2	4.17	0	0.00	4	2.35
	Portfolio creation	0	0.00	2	4.17	0	0.00	2	1.18
	Lapbooks	1	1.41	1	2.08	0	0.00	2	1.18
F orms	Excursions	6	8.45	1	2.08	2	3.92	9	5.29
	Online forms (e. g. Khan Academy)	3	4.23	3	6.25	2	3.92	8	4.71
	Learning outside	3	4.23	1	2.08	2	3.92	6	3.53
	Hobby activities	2	2.82	1	2.08	1	1.96	4	2.35
	Community schools, groups	1	1.41	0	0.00	2	3.92	3	1.76
a.c.	Montessori	2	2.82	2	4.17	5	9.80	9	5.29
	Other	6	8.45	11	22.92	6	11.76	23	13.53

Legend: PL – Poland, CZ – the Czech Republic, SK – Slovakia, a. c. – alternative conceptions

Research methods

Research problem

The research problem was formulated on the basis of a number of previous studies (Kostelecká, 2010; Kašparová, 2019; Rochovská & Mazur, 2019; Rochovská, Mazur & Dolinská, 2019; Mazur, Rochovská & Klačková, 2019). As shown in Table 1, it was found that 14.12 % of parents of homeschooled children, participating in the research, preferred unschooling² as the main form of education. Other preferred methods included working with a textbook (8.82 %), working with a workbook (5.29 %) or reading, writing, and speaking (8.24 %). Reported organizational forms included mainly excursions (5.29 %), learning outside (3.53 %) and learning in a community school or group (1.76 %). Parents of homeschooled children also reported that they were using various projects, the pedagogical concepts of Maria Montessori, plays, experiential learning, etc. (Rochovská, Mazur & Dolinská, 2019). Mazur, Rochovská & Klačková (2019) investigated whether the pedagogical education of parents of homeschooled children in Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Poland had an impact on their choice of teaching methods. The hypothesis that respondents without pedagogical education preferred unschooling more than respondents with pedagogical education was not confirmed. Likewise, the hypothesis that respondents with pedagogical education preferred classical methods and forms (working with a textbook, a workbook or reading, writing, and speaking) more than respondents without pedagogical education was also not confirmed.

The current research problem thus was an investigation of selected factors which influence the choice of methods and forms of homeschooling. The aim of the research was to find out, based on opinions of of homeschooled children's parents, whether their preference for the methods and forms in homeschooling depended on the age of respondents and on the number of children being homeschooled. Based on the aim of the research and in connection with the results of the research mentioned above, four hypotheses were formulated:

² Unschooling can be considered one of the forms of homeschooling. While some parents strictly follow the prescribed curriculum and make an effort to teach the subject matter using curricular documents or textbooks, parents pursuing unschooling are led by the child's interests and needs regardless of the prescribed curriculum. The concept of unschooling may be identified with Holt's philosophy of education (1964, 1967, 2003). Here, learning is perceived as a life-long process where the whole world around is the classroom (Ricci, 2012).

H1: Younger respondents in PL, CZ, and SK prefer unschooling more than older respondents in the same countries;

H2: Older respondents in PL, CZ, and SK are more likely to prefer classical methods and forms than active methods (e.g. working with a textbook, workbook or reading, writing and speaking) more than younger respondents in the same countries;

H3: Respondents homeschooling one child prefer unschooling more than respondents homeschooling more than one child in researched countries;

H4: Respondents homeschooling one child prefer classical methods and forms (working with a textbook, a workbook or reading, writing and speaking) more likely more than respondents homeschooling more than one child in researched countries.

Research sample

The research involved 78 parents of homeschooled children, including 30 in Poland (PL), 27 in the Czech Republic (CZ), and 21 in Slovakia (SK). The age of parents ranged between 21 and 60 years. Most respondents were 31 to 40 years old (Table 2).

Table 2. Age of respondents

Age (years)	PL		CZ		SK		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
21–30	0	0.00	1	3.70	2	9.52	3	3.85
31–40	14	46.67	16	59.26	14	66.67	44	56.41
41–50	12	40.00	10	37.04	5	23.81	27	34.62
51–60	3	10.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	3.85
No answer	1	3.33	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	1.28
Total	30	100	27	100	21	100	78	100

Of the total number of respondents, 66.67% were homeschooling one child, 30.77% more than one child, and 2.56% failed to give the number of children being homeschooled (Table 3).

Of the total number of children, 1.89% were 5 years old, 10.38% were 6 years old, 23.58% were 7 years old, 10.38% were 8 years old, 14.15% were 9 years old, 14.15% were 10 years old, 7.55% were 11 years old, 8.49% were 12 years old, 3.77% were 13 years old, 2.83% were 14 years old, 1.89% were 18 years old, and 0.94% were 19 years old.

Table 3. Number of homeschooled children per respondent

Number of children	PL		CZ		SK		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1	23	76.67	16	59.26	13	61.90	52	66.67
2	4	13.33	7	25.93	7	33.33	18	23.08
3	1	3.33	4	14.81	0	0.00	5	6.41
4	1	3.33	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	1.28
No answer	1	3.33	0	0.00	1	4.76	2	2.56
Total	30	100	27	100	21	100	78	100

Research tools and procedures

The research tool included an online structured questionnaire consisting of ten open-ended items. Four items were assessed to verify the above hypotheses. Respondents reported which methods and forms they preferred in homeschooling their children. No common classification of methods and forms was used in order to obtain authentic statements from respondents. They also reported their age and number of children being homeschooled. The questionnaire was administered online via homeschooling social groups.

Data analysis

Data were evaluated using a quantitative approach. Respondents answered the open-ended question “Which methods and forms did you choose in homeschooling your child?” in their own words. There was no limit of length for the answers. Subsequently, the answers were grouped in categories. The most frequent category was “unschooling” (14.12 %), encompassing all statements of respondents that corresponded with the philosophy of unschooling, e.g. “self-directed education”, “the child self-educates”, etc. If respondents’ answer contained more methods and forms with at least one being unschooling, or a statement corresponding with the philosophy of unschooling, the answer was included in the category “unschooling” and the other reported methods and forms were included in other relevant categories.

The second most frequent category was named “classical methods and forms” and included three sub-categories: “working with a textbook” (8.82 %), “reading, writing and speaking” (8.24 %) and “working with a workbook” (5.29 %).

The above two most frequent categories – “unschooling” and “classical methods and forms” – became variables in formulation of the hypotheses. The hypotheses

were tested statistically. Data were verified using Pearson's Chi-square test of independence.

Research results

Influence of respondents' age on their preference for unschooling

Data on respondents' age and preferred methods and forms reported by respondents are presented in the pivot table below (Table 4).

Table 4. Respondents' age and preference of methods and forms in homeschooling

	Current frequency			Expected frequency	
	Preference for unschooling (24)	Preference for other methods and forms * (53)		Preference for unschooling	Preference for other methods and forms*
Under 40 years of age (47)	19	28	Under 40 years of age	14.65	32.35
Above 40 years of age (30)	5	25	Above 40 years of age	9.35	20.65

* apart from unschooling

Of younger respondents under 40 years of age ($n = 47$), 19 (40.43 %) reported preference for unschooling, and 28 (59.57 %) preference for other homeschooling methods and forms. Of older respondents above 40 years of age ($n = 30$), 5 (16.67 %) reported preference for unschooling, and 25 (83.33 %) preference for other homeschooling methods and forms. One respondent failed to give their age (Table 2).

The hypothesis was verified using Pearson's Chi-square test of independence. There was a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2(1) = 4.818$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.028$) between respondents under 40 years of age and above 40 years of age, in preference for unschooling and other homeschooling methods and forms. The hypothesis H1 was accepted.

Influence of the age of respondents on preference for classical methods and forms in homeschooling

Data on respondents' age and preferred methods and forms reported are presented in the pivot table below (Table 5).

Table 5. Respondents' age and preference of homeschooling methods and forms

	Current frequency			Expected frequency	
	Preference for classical methods and forms * (38)	Preference for other methods and forms * (39)		Preference for classical methods and forms *	Preference for other methods and forms *
Under 40 years of age (47)	19	28	Under 40 years of age	23.19	23.81
Above 40 years of age (30)	19	11	Above 40 years of age	14.81	15.19

* apart from classical methods and forms

Of younger respondents under 40 years of age ($n = 47$), 19 (40.43%) reported preference for classical methods and forms, and 28 (59.57%) preference for other methods and forms in homeschooling. Of older respondents above 40 years of age ($n = 30$), 19 (63.33%) reported preference for classical methods and forms, and 11 (36.67%) preference for other methods and forms in homeschooling. One respondent failed to give their age (Table 2).

The hypothesis was verified using Pearson's Chi-square test of independence. There was a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2(1) = 3.844$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.050$) between older and younger respondents, in preference for classical methods and forms and other methods and forms in homeschooling. The hypothesis H2 was accepted.

Influence of the number of homeschooled children on preference of unschooling

Data on the number of homeschooled children and preferred methods and forms reported by respondents are presented in the pivot table below (Table 6).

Of respondents homeschooling one child, ($n = 52$), 14 (26.92 %) reported preference for unschooling, and 38 (73.08 %) preference for other homeschooling methods and forms. Of respondents homeschooling more than one child ($n = 24$), 10 (41.67 %) reported preference for unschooling and 14 (58.33 %) preference

Table 6. Number of children homeschooled and preference for homeschooling methods and forms

	Current frequency			Expected frequency	
	Preference for un-schooling (24)	Preference for other methods and forms * (52)		Preference for un-schooling	Preference for other methods and forms*
One child (52)	14	38	One child	16.42	35.58
More than one child (24)	10	14	More than one child	7.58	16.42

* apart from unschooling

for other homeschooling methods and forms. Two respondents failed to give the number of children being homeschooled (Table 3).

The hypothesis was verified using Pearson's Chi-square test of independence. There was no statistically significant difference ($(\chi^2(1) = 1,652, df = 1, p = 0.199)$) between respondents homeschooling one child and respondents homeschooling more children, in preference for unschooling and other homeschooling methods and forms. The hypothesis H3 was rejected.

Influence of the number of homeschooled children on preference for classical methods and forms in homeschooling

Data on the number of homeschooled children and preferred methods and forms reported by respondents are presented in the pivot table below (Table 7).

Table 7. Number of children homeschooled and preference for homeschooling methods and forms

	Current frequency			Expected frequency	
	Preference for classical methods and forms * (38)	Preference for other methods and forms * (39)		Preference for classical methods and forms *	Preference for other methods and forms *
One child (52)	25	27	One child	25.32	26.68
More than one child (24)	12	12	More than one child	11.68	12.32

* apart from classical methods and forms

Of respondents homeschooling one child, ($n = 52$), 25 (48.08 %) reported preference for classical methods and forms and 27 (51.92 %) preference for other methods and forms in homeschooling. Of respondents homeschooling more than one child ($n = 24$), 12 (50 %) reported preference for classical methods and forms and 12 (50 %) preference for other methods and forms in homeschooling. Two respondents failed to give the number of children being homeschooled (Table 3).

The hypothesis was verified using Pearson's Chi-square test of independence. There was no statistically significant difference ($\chi^2(1) = 0,24$, $df = 1$, $p = 0,876$) between respondents homeschooling one child and respondents homeschooling more children, in preference for classical and other methods and forms in homeschooling. The hypothesis H4 was rejected.

Discussion

The research confirmed that younger respondents preferred unschooling more than older respondents. However, the popularity of unschooling in the countries studied may be expected to rise in future (Kašparová, 2019).

It was also found that older respondents preferred classical methods and forms in homeschooling more. Older respondents (above 40 years of age) in the post-communist countries which were examined in the research, had studied either during the era of communism or not long after it, thus in their schooling classical methods and frontal forms of education, uniformity, directive approach, etc. had been applied. By contrast, younger respondents (under 40 years of age) could have also experienced innovative methods and forms of education during their schooling. Educators can be expected to use mainly the methods and forms they themselves experienced during their schooling.

Respondents homeschooling more than one child did not prefer unschooling more than respondents homeschooling only one child. Also, respondents homeschooling one child did not prefer classical methods and forms more than respondents homeschooling more than one child. The research findings do not agree with Kašparová's (2019) assertion that the more experience the educator (parent in this case) has, the more relaxed his or her approach is to the prescribed curriculum and so he or she dares to also apply alternative methods and forms of education.

Parents homeschooling more children certainly have more experience with such education than parents homeschooling the first child. Nevertheless, the research confirmed that the number of children homeschooled had no influence on respondents' choice of homeschooling methods and forms.

Limitations of the research are that the questionnaire method allows us to determine only preferences for homeschooling methods and forms, but not the actual situation. A series of observations should be carried out to show which methods and forms are actually used by respondents. Although the questionnaire question was “*Which methods and forms did you choose in homeschooling your child?*”, the term “preference” of methods and forms was used instead of “use” when interpreting the results.

Conclusion

The conclusions of the research may contribute to more detailed information on the issue of didactic aspects of homeschooling. It was found that younger respondents preferred unschooling more than older respondents, while older respondents preferred classical methods and forms more. It was also found that the number of children homeschooled did not influence their parents’ choice of homeschooling methods and forms.

The choice of homeschooling methods and forms depends to a large extent on the goal of education as seen by parents. Parents preferring classical methods and forms may perceive success in a compulsory examination as the goal. On the other hand, parents preferring unschooling perceive education rather as learning for life and so its goal should be acquiring competencies which help the child to live a valuable life. These considerations may also be perceived as implications for further research. In addition, the aim of further research could be to find out whether there is connection between preferred methods and forms and problems in compulsory examination. It can be assumed that respondents preferring unschooling may have more problems in the compulsory examination which is more in line with the classical school system, and may be more oriented to tests and memorization of the prescribed subject matter. It can also be assumed that where parents work with a textbook and workbook to homeschool their children, their children will have fewer problems in the compulsory examination. The examination requires that prescribed content and performance standards are achieved, and learning tasks in textbooks and workbooks are based precisely on these prescribed standards.

Homeschooling is not a modern phenomenon, although its legal application in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland does not have a long tradition. However, opinions of parents of homeschooled children and the success of their children in end-of-year compulsory examinations as well as in university entrance tests

indicate that, when conceived appropriately, homeschooling may be a sufficient alternative to school education.

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