

## Learning to Know: The Strength of Homeschooling in the Philippines



### Education

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the homeschooling phenomenon as it comes as a possible alternative form of education to the formal education system. Being an alternative, however, requires that it serves the national educational objectives of the system that it seeks to be an alternative to. The central research question that this study asks is how the homeschool curriculum and instruction develop the students in learning to know, which is one pillar of education that it must support. The study utilizes a qualitative exploratory design, having six co-researchers, who participated in individual storytelling sessions and in-depth interviews. The main finding of the study is that the homeschooling experience in the Philippines is strong in developing students' learning to know as evidenced in their academic independence.*

### Introduction

The rising trend of the homeschooling phenomenon has become visible across the globe, in countries such as England and Wales (Safran, 2010), South Africa (van Schalkwyk & Bouwer, 2011), and Israel (Meisels, 2004).

Another rather striking data is revealed by Spiegler (2003) who disclosed that 500 children are home educated in Germany despite its being illegal and regarded as a criminal offence. Spiegler's (2003) research further claims that this number will inevitably continue to grow even if the country's legal position towards homeschooling does not change.

Among the ten Asian countries accounted for by the Home School Legal Defense Association or HSLDA, the strongest US-based organization to defend the constitutional rights of parents over their children's education, the Philippines and Japan have the largest homeschooled population, with an updated estimate number of 4,000 families, with Indonesia having approximately 2,000, India, South Korea and Taiwan having approximately 500 – 1,000, and Hong Kong having approximately 50 – 100 (HSLDA International, 2013). China, Thailand, and Singapore are said to have the homeschooling movement in the country but because of its covert presence, HSLDA International (2013) does not report any estimate number.

The central issues that arouse controversy among education stakeholders and public leaders in countries where homeschooling is present include educational responsibility (Cox, 2006), questions on extent of parental involvement in children's education (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007) and the overall effect on community lifestyle (Neuman & Aviram, 2003).

In the same light, homeschooling has emerged in the Philippine education system. It is a phenomenon that has stirred many issues in the international education community and not surprisingly may stir the Philippine community as well. But then, since little is known about the homeschooling practice in the Philippines, fair judgment of its worth is also restricted.

Thus, the critical question with which to approach alternative forms of education must also apply to homeschooling.

### Central Research Question

This study endeavored to have an adequate understanding of the core of homeschooling as an alternative to formal schooling gleaned from the perspective of the homeschooled students.

**Thus, the central question that this study sought to answer is:**

To what extent does the homeschool curriculum and instruction develop the students in *learning to know*? How does homeschooling increase the students' awareness of and responsiveness to the changes in society?

### Research Design

This study disclosed how the homeschooling experience forms its students into the envisioned Filipino basic education graduates.

Demanded by its purpose, this research utilized a qualitative exploratory method, which is deemed the most appropriate approach that can lead the study to its main objective.

The nature of homeschooling phenomenon calls for a qualitative approach as it would allow the researcher to gain access into the inner experiences of the participants that no quantitative measure can even approximate. As Flick (2009) claims (cited in Smith & Bowers-Brown, 2010), qualitative research is done to contribute to a better understanding of social realities by drawing attention to the processes and meanings of people's actual experiences, particularly, homeschooling for this research.

This study involved six participants who met the following criteria: a) the participants must have had a homeschooling experience during their elementary and secondary education years; b) the participants must have been willing to participate in the research, which would call for their time and openness to share their experience; and c) the participants must currently be in college at the time of this study.

Individual storytelling sessions with the homeschooled students who are already in college were used hand in hand with in-depth interviews. Storytelling is a powerful technique to let the participants share their first-hand experience of and feelings towards their schooling at home during their elementary and secondary years.

The storytelling sessions were open and casual sessions where the participants directed their story as spontaneously as they wished to. It was then backed up with an in-depth interview where the researcher asked questions that followed through the co-researchers' stories and filled in the data gaps that were not initially covered in the story, making the interview an indispensable data gathering technique (Sampa, 2012a) in this type of research.

### Findings

A significant area of homeschooling that was explored in this study is what has become of the homeschooled graduates, as they have transitioned from homeschooling to mainstream college.

A remarkable result of years of homeschooling as evidenced in the co-researchers' narrations is the I-Can-Do-This Syndrome, which is a condition of the mind that enables the homeschooled student to grow in academic independence. Inherent to the setup of any homeschooler is the opportunity to gain this academic value that is marked by a stimulated independent learning, a self-dictated pace of instruction, and a set of self-imposed study habits.

### Stimulated independent learning

Independent learning is the ability to discover meaning of content being studied either through one's own understanding or through one's own resourcefulness to search for clarity, with minimal dependence on other people.

The homeschool setup, with each child being the only student in his respective grade level, to some degree forces the homeschooling student to learn by himself. This experience is best captured in the narration of co-researcher Nikki:

*The whole time that we were homeschooling, Mom was around because she stopped working when I was a kid and Dad was providing all the money. Mom would explain to me my readings only when I do not understand. But since I was the eldest, I studied on my own and then I would help Mom teach the younger kids.*

The independence that homeschooled students naturally developed because of the given study setup they have is something that they themselves acknowledge to be advantageous especially as they go to college. Co-researcher Claudine, for instance, shared her appreciation for the training she had in homeschooling and how it made her value studying for the sake of learning:

*When I entered college, I had an easier time adjusting to studying. I also had lots of reading but I feel that I was trained enough to learn independently, read, think, and write independently as well. That's how it was in homeschooling. I actually enjoyed learning in college. For me, it wasn't just about the grades. I was more after the learning that I get out of going to school and attending my classes. I didn't really make it to the Dean's list but I consider learning the materials so well that I can discuss it with someone else outside the school setting an achievement.*

### Self-dictated pace of instruction

There also surfaced the pattern from the co-researchers' experience that the pace of studying and covering the prescribed content may be self-dictated and affected by different factors.

Depending on the determination of the student, the speed in finishing the entire course may be hastened or delayed. This fluctuating pace is best represented in the case of co-researcher Nikki, who started homeschool in Grade 1. With the assistance of a hired tutor, the first levels of her homeschooling were stable and in keeping with the prescribed pace. When she was weaned off the tutors and transferred to the mother's full time mother-teacher role yet divided among her other homeschooling children, Nikki's pace started to slow down until it finally came to a complete and premature stop. Two years before the end of her high school, Nikki lost her passion to study and was unable to bring herself to finish homeschooling. She recalled her experience:

*It took me two years to finish Grade 8 instead of the usual one year. And then, the same thing happened with Grade 9 when my parents forced me to go back to studying. But for Grade 10, that was it! I stopped studying. Mom ordered the Grade 11 curriculum. I touched it but never really opened it.*

These statements show that the homeschooling experience is marked with a self-dictated pace of instruction.

### Self-imposed study habits

Another remarkable merit that the homeschool setup brings with it is the students' self-imposed study habits. Studying with rigor and seriousness alone in the environment of a home, a place that is normally sought for rest, is not an easy task for a child.

However, when a child realizes that his home happens to be his school as well where serious study has to take place, he then naturally imposes on himself habits that allow him to advance in his studies.

Co-researcher Ching frankly shared at hindsight how her study habits developed:

*It took several years before I started to accept the fact that I am homeschooling, I have to study on my own, and no one is going to finish homeschooling for me except for myself. So, when things happen to you – when you are homeschooled though you blatantly don't want to be – when things like that happen to you, you realize that you have to do what you have to do. And sometimes, even if it's not something that you want, you just have to do it.*

For some homeschooled students, it took less time to be at ease with studying on one's own while for others, it took more time and more external help to let study habits naturally set in. In either case, the formation of good study habits were self-imposed because of the intrinsic motivation to move on in their studies.

### Conclusion

This study finds the homeschool curriculum and instruction strong in developing students in *learning to know* as evidence shows that homeschooled students grow to be academically independent. The entire homeschool experience develops an I-Can-Do-This syndrome, which is the condition of the mind that enables the homeschooled student to be independent learners through a self-dictated pace of instruction and a set of self-imposed study habits.

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