

Socializing Skills of Homeschooled Children

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ABSTRACT

The research was meant to provide an insight into the impact of homeschooling on the socializing skills of children. The study conducted a secondary study to collect relevant information about experience of students and parents in terms of social skills development along with empathy, moral values and ethical norms of students who complete their education in a homeschooled environment. It is often assumed that homeschooled children lack social interaction skills due to limited opportunities of interacting with friends and peers as in case of public schooled students. However, the results of the study revealed that homeschooled children are equally capable in terms of socializing as their conventionally educated counterparts. At the same time it is indicated that parents of homeschooled children are responsible to ensure ample opportunities of regular interaction with other children, and adults through planned activities aiming to develop skills like empathy, observation skills, mindfulness, anger management, understanding emotions of others and positive interactions while managing negative behaviour of people in childhood as well as adulthood. The study concludes that homeschooling can help a child redevelop strong social skills, provided necessary teaching approach is offered by the parent instructor for facilitation of constructive social interactions with peers.

Keywords: *Socialization, Social Skills, Homeschooling, Interactions, Morals, Mindfulness, Education*

Socialization is the process where people communicate with each other and learn the behavioral rules, beliefs, and attitudes helping them to function well in society (Medlin, 2000). Learning the proper way of interacting with others is a key skill that children should focus on every stage of life (Gresham, 1990). A study conducted by Cooney found that social skills of children as associated with work and their ability to read and write are strongly connected when they started school (Cooney, 1998). There are other studies like that presented by Griffin showing that children who know the way of proper behavior in classroom, like sitting quietly and following instructions, tend to do better in subjects that are important to learn in early years, even more than other factors like IQ or a mother's education (Griffin, 1998). However, good social skills are not a focus of a large number of children and their learners during childhood leading to future academic struggle and trouble adjusting to the society (Gresham, 1990). Such a lack of social skills may result in poor relationships with adults and peers in future. Schools are considered as one of the main

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places where children learn to socialize. However, homeschooling with becoming a major trend in recent years has raised the question on social development and socializing skills of homeschooled children.

Earlier, homeschooling focused on freeing students from the limitations of traditional schooling that allows them to pursue their own interests. John Holt, the primary leader in the redevelopment of the concept of homeschooling in the 1970s opposed all forms of formal education, believing that the rigid curriculum did not account for the individual interests of students and therefore fails to nurture their unique abilities (Bauman, 2002). Homeschooling advocates view traditional schools as a place of suffering, where children are forced to sit still, stay quiet, and complete repetitive assignments in a cycle of compulsory learning (Bauman, 2002). Instead of encouraging children to explore what they enjoy, formal education forces them to do what a few people think is best. The proponents of this new method of learning also emphasize on children spending more time with their parents. In Western societies, it is believed that the responsibility of educating children should lie with parents and therefore the idea of homeschooling fit into the social movement of family-centred values (Kunzman, 2012). This movement opposed the curriculum of public schools while advocating the idea of individual initiative and self-direction in learning.

However, the critics associated with this idea of homeschooling comes up with a major argument related to its impact on a child's ability to develop social skills necessary for life (Fineman and Shepherd, 2016). This raises the question of how homeschooling affects a child's social development that is central to this study. Homeschooling is beneficial for young children where they can learn new skills in familiar environment of their home. Since the purpose of education is not only to impart academic knowledge but also to teach social skills for meaningful interactions with others, it is important that parents of homeschooling children consider the social needs of their child (Guterman and Neuman, 2017a). There is a thought that homeschooling while protecting children from poor behaviour of peers could limit their opportunity to learn life skills and interact with people from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, even while selecting homeschooling as an option for educating their children, parents should look for opportunities to allow children interact with other children in their neighbourhood, helping them develop required social skills that may not be taught through traditional educational methods.

Significance of the Study

Exploring the experience of homeschooled children will provide an insight into the role of this method of education in the field of socializing. It will benefit the parents by helping them to better understand the ways of developing their child's social skills. As Kaunzman (2012) explained, learning experiences of children more engaged at home are lively and beneficial for young children. This understanding will help in informing parents on the ways to deal with children while helping them to develop social skills in a homeschooling environment. At the same time, it will remove the myths associated with children lacking proper ways to behave, interact and socialize while coming from a homeschooled environment. This will encourage parents to consider their attitudes towards adopting homeschooling focused on improving the knowledge and skills of children while encouraging them to learn life skills and strong social skills without the need of facing the negative behaviour of peers and others in the society. Therefore, the study will act as a guide for parents to understand the needs of their children better and the practical way to remain focused on social skills while imparting education within the home.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There lies a debate about whether homeschooling provides ample opportunities to develop strong social skills and it is characterized by lots of socio-cultural diversities leading researchers to work more about the parallel education system (Gaither, 2021). Here it is important to understand that the term socialization refers to the process where an individual gains the social skills required to efficiently navigate the social norms and behaviours of the broader society (Romanowski, 2010). Children who study in homeschooling system are required to build the “social fluency” thereby helping them to negotiate a variety of different social situations, develop strong relationships, and work well along with others in the society (Aldort, 2019). At the same time this term of ‘socialization’ can also refer to the procedure where children focus on learning to be tolerant and accepting the different personalities and backgrounds while interacting with peers from diverse culture and societies. When home educators socialize their children with different children in various contexts, they can enable their children to develop the skills required to succeed as adults (Dale, 2020). Considering the large body of research focused on children’s social skills when coming from homeschooling environment, it is seen that a majority of studies find that the mode of study rarely affect or harm children’s development of social skills. Here, it is important to discuss a study conducted by Robert Kunzman and Milton Gaither (2000) where the limitations of earlier research work on homeschooling and socialization were highlighted. The authors explained that earlier studies there was a high probability of oversampling of children whose parents are more engaged, lack neutral assessments of social skills of children and they failed to consider whether children were attending the school part-time or enrolled in co-ops (Medlin, 2016). Two of such studies gave very different results. In the year 2004, homeschooling parent Brian Ray conducted a study with homeschooled graduates claiming a large number of positive findings. On the contrary, in the year 2014, Homeschool Alumni Reaching Out (HARO) conducted a study where 25% of respondents reported poor social skills, and the quality of their social skills depends on how well they were prepared for the future (Dale, 2020). At the same time, there is a possibility that these surveys and results respondents may have limited understanding of ‘socialization’, considering it a simple social interaction and ignoring the broader development of social skills and fluency (Guterman & Neuman, 2017b).

Contrary to the common belief that homeschooled children are antisocial, several studies have shown that these children often display good behaviour that is accepted in society (Guterman & Neuman, 2017b). Research data suggests that one short-term benefit of homeschooling is that it helps teach morals and values because the child receives full attention from a parent, who also acts as the teacher. However, the long-term effects of homeschooling on children's social skills are not well studied. Kunzman and Gaither (2013) argued that parents should consider the child's overall development into adulthood before choosing homeschooling. This means the main goal of homeschooling should be to teach social skills, so children can effectively interact with people from different backgrounds in the future. Overall, research shows that homeschooling can have both positive and negative effects on a child's social skills.

As Pazhwak et al. (2022) explained that research studies conducted to test socialization skills of homeschooled children cannot tell an individual parent about the best their children. There are cases where parents enrol their children later in conventional schools as they find homeschooling inefficient in meeting the social needs of the child at home; while in other cases, children facing bullying decide to shift from public school system to a homeschooling

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system. Therefore, it is required that research work on socialization of homeschooling children should focus on different questions and areas of interactions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Questions: A variety of case studies are used in this study to explore the social skills of children studies in homeschooling arrangement. The study aims to find answers to below research questions:

- a) What is the impact of homeschooling on social skill development of children?
- b) What is the impact of instructional practices used by instructors in homeschooling on development of children's socialization skills?

Research Method

The current study is associated with a broad area of social skills among children, so a qualitative form of data collected from secondary sources of information is followed under the study. This method makes it possible to explore several areas and factors affecting social skills of children in home environment and public schooling system. The secondary sources of information also provide the opportunities to look for activities and instruction route that can enhance social skills of students while being homeschooled.

Data Collection

The current study is based on secondary sources of information and therefore, data is collected from previous studies based on similar themes of homeschooling and social skills of children coming from such a schooling system. Here, four key studies are selected to present the information based on role of homeschooling in developing social skills, activities that could help in better interactions of children from homeschooling environment and the ways to limit the disadvantages of homeschooling system that have the potential of hampering the socialization skills of children. The targeted studies also provide the proper way to develop social skills that can help homeschooled children to navigate social expectations in adulthood.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A study conducted by Koehler et al. (2012) focused on comparing socializing skills of homeschooled children with that of conventionally schooled children. The study is targeted to benefit occupational therapists involved in offering activities to children to enhance the development of social skills. Therefore, the study by Koehler used Social Skills Rating Scale for comparing the social skills of twenty-three children, seven among which were home-schooled and sixteen of which were educated in traditional school system. By examining the differences and similarities among two groups the researchers indicated that home schooled children have above average social skills in comparison to public schooled children. The result of this study also explains the need of more outdoor activities whether in music, sports, other hobbies making children develop better social skills and mature to handle people from diverse backgrounds. The researchers found homeschooled children scored high in terms of cooperation, assertation, responsibility and self-control. Hence, they came out much matured in comparison to conventionally educated children and were able to from teams and conduct tasks with cooperation and better communication in comparison to public schooled children.

Another study conducted by Abuzandah (2020). Focused on social skills for homeschooling students while considering the learning theories of several scholars like Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget explaining the basics of homeschooling and its impact on social skills. The study

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based on a large number of case studies reveals that homeschooling is a strong route to impart good moral and ethical values among children that forms the basis of positive physical interaction with peers. Hence, home schooling is capable of enhancing the social skills of children, provided the efficient approach of teaching and instructing are followed by parents to facilitate constructive social interactions with peers. Homeschooling help parents to follow a social constructivism approach towards learning where children are given the opportunity to interact with others through controlled virtual platforms like social media (Amineh and Asl, 2015). This approach as advocated by Lev Vygotsky allows homeschooled children to acquire social skills and good manners in a deductive way while being at home (Abuzansah, 2020). On the contrary the same study indicates that there are cases where children acquire moral values but fails to acquire skills to deal with social challenges and interacting effectively with their neighbor peers. This perspective is linked by the researcher with theory of cognitive development as proposed by Jean Piaget postulating that experiential knowledge is always required for cognitive development of a child. Therefore, homeschooled children must be given more opportunities of one-to-one social interactions with peers and adults to understand the way different people react differently to diverse emotional stimuli.

Third study considered here is the one conducted by Bahri et al. (2023). Focused on studying the impact of homeschooling on social skills of children from the perspective of father and mother separately. The research also focused on religious minded parents and a case study approach to conduct a thematic analysis of the situation. The results of the study indicated that the social skills of homeschooled children are adequate to adapt to the society norms in adulthood. They are positively able to make strong relationships and hold the competence for arguments and manage disagreements. The research highlights the responsibility of parents to be present to make up for the social life of children and plan multifocal social activities for them to develop harmony with people around them. Furthermore, social skills development should not be limited to interactions and human relationships but develop ties with other living beings and environment. The study also highlights the need of developing social skills to be harmonious with spirituality and get connected with the creator that could form the basis of moral values and empathy required while dealing with peers and other adults in the society. The key components of social skills that parents should focus on includes the capacity of children to adapt to the society, the ability to establish a relationship and the competence to manage disagreements.

Our fourth study is the one presented by Dale (2020) discussing the socialization issues related with homeschooling. The researcher argues that homeschooling is often criticized considering that homeschooled children lack the necessary socializing skills to communicate effectively in the real world and this is a major reason that hampers their personality as a responsible citizen (Dale, 2020). To counter these arguments, the researcher conducted a quantitative study where data is collected from parents and children coming from homeschooled environment. The results of this study indicate that teaching the basics and managing behavior is important and should help student to develop manners, morality and effective communication skills. It is also important to nurture the individuality of children that help children to recognize the role of personality in socializing, building character and cultivating potential. Parent instructor should establish family identity through facilitation of relationships, delegation of responsibilities to children and becoming a refuge as and when its required by the child. There is also a need to engage with real world where relationships must be supervised and giving small responsibilities while arranging real-life activities for children and encouraging them to expand their horizons. These are some of the practical

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ways to improve social skills of homeschooled children that becomes the practical route to develop children with managed behavior and nurtured individuality helping them engage in the real world in adulthood.

Contrary to the commonly expressed concern about homeschooling making it synonymous with social deprivation, several studies conducted with parents and homeschooled children reveals that homeschooled children have the opportunity to interact with a wide range of people instead of limiting their exposure to a limited age-group of school students. Such a wide range of interaction makes these students much more confident and mature in their social skills thereby preparing them well for the adulthood interactions and relationships. The results of the above studies explains that the capacity to adapt to society can be achieved by allowing children to indulge in outdoor activities, visiting new places and meet new people to develop observation skills, social adaptability and social resilience. Similarly, the ability to establish a relationship can be developed through opportunities to communicate with different people, friends and peers, activities involving discussions and debates, team building and working in collaborative activities to develop respect and empathy towards people in the society. Lastly, the competence to manage disagreements can be developed through activities and games requiring problem solving skills, restraining anger and the habit of forgiveness. These activities may take the form of role-playing scenarios (like practice apologizing and forgiving in a safe environment), reading stories about forgiveness and empathy and practicing mindfulness exercises (like Feelings Wheel to help children identify and name their emotions) where children become aware of their emotions and the emotions of others, kindness and service projects, board games like “Happy or Not”, “My Feelings” and reading and discussions about importance of letting go of grudges.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study explains that homeschooling is an important method of education that proves to be efficient as an alternative to the traditional school-based education system. As many parents seek to impart strong moral and ethical values among their children while remaining focused on their creative skills, they may opt for homeschooling route to education that even save students from facing any negative behaviour of peers and other adults. However, it is necessary that parents while playing the role of instructor in homeschooling system make sure that the social skills of children are not adversely affected due to limited interaction with outside world and people are from a diverse backgrounds.

The efficient development of socializing skills in homeschooling environment depends on the approach of parents towards method of instruction and opportunities provided to children to meet and socialize with different children and people in the society. Therefore, it is important that homeschooling is effectively used by parents to provide basic education, moral education as well as social skills to enable them to navigate through diverse social platforms in the future. Homeschooling should not be limited becoming a monolith. Some homeschooling children may be involved in a football club, some others may opt for music classes, and a writing class where they have their friends giving them possibilities of social interactions while other students in traditional education system may not have friends and social life thereby hampering their social skills. Therefore, homeschooling is not the factor that may affect socializing skills of children negatively, but it is the mix of activities and opportunities of interaction with friends that affect the socializing skills of children in any form of education system.

Implications of the Study

The results of this study will help parents to take a decision in favour of homeschooling method of education without worrying about the development of social skills of their children. Now, they know the ways to make homeschooling interesting and giving opportunities to children to interact with their friends regularly and indulge in more outdoor activities to develop strong socializing skills.

Suggestions for Future Study

Future studies can be conducted using primary method of study where direct responses about some specific areas of socialization can be considered to define the questions. Social skills are not limited to day-to-day interactions and future studies may focus on skills of addressing a large audience, fear of working with a large number of colleagues, making presentation in front of a large number of people, etc.

Limitations

This study is based on secondary method of research that may result in certain limitations. Relying only on secondary research and ignoring the possibility of primary sources of information may limit the generalization of the results of the study. At the same time, a small sample size is again a limitation of this study as it creates a doubt on reliability of results of the study.

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Conflict of Interest

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