Homeschooling in Malaysia: The Implications for Teacher Services

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ABSTRACT

In Malaysia, homeschooling is a form of alternative education that emphasizes quality education based on moral values and belief in strengthening family ties. The purpose of this study is to produce a Factor Selection Model of homeschooling which is based on the connotation that parents reject the public school system. This model can be used as a guideline to improve the quality of the education system in terms of teacher services quality. This study uses Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) as a process to develop a model and map the relationship between the elements in the Factor Selection Model of homeschooling in Malaysia. This study dismantles the complex system into several sub-systems using the practical experience and knowledge of parents conducting homeschooling in Malaysia. A group of fifteen experts reached a consensus on six elements for selection of homeschooling: Religious and ethical reasons; Family Lifestyle and Parenting; Demographics; Home Environment; Special Needs of the Child; and Educational Philosophy. The findings can provide guidance to policy makers and curriculum implementers on policies which need to be developed related to homeschooling curriculum design and teacher training (teacher services). The findings also highlight the short and long-term implications for the organization of the homeschooling curriculum and its practice in mainstream schools, and for teachers' needs and efficiency in future.

Keywords: **Alternative Education, Homeschooling, Home Education, Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM).**

INTRODUCTION

The Compulsory Education Act for primary schools implemented in 2003 provides that a child in Malaysia should follow the 11-year compulsory education system (Surat Pekeliling Ikhtisas, Bil. 14/2002). In accordance with the provisions in Section 29A of this Act, parents are required to ensure that children aged six years and above attend school in accordance with the free and compulsory education. However, the presence of information technology today has made it possible for several alternative forms of education to be undertaken within the mainstream education system in Malaysia. Among them is Homeschooling (Ruslina Ibrahim, Rohani Abdul Aziz, Norlidah Alias, & Saedah Siraj, 2012; Ebinezar, 2008; Mohd Nazri Abdul Rahman, Norlidah Alias, & Saedah Siraj, 2012).

Homeschooling in Malaysia is considered still at an early stage. Official figures posted by the Ministry of Education show that almost 5000 children are undergoing homeschooling in Malaysia, but the actual figures are expected to exceed that number. (Ibrahim Bajunid, 2002).

Homeschooling education is also known as home education or home-based schooling. In the Malaysian context, homeschooling is a form of alternative education choice for parents who educate their children at home during the official school hours, using either the standard mainstream curriculum of the Ministry of Education, or an alternative curriculum which may have been purchased from abroad.

Studies conducted in the early 1990s until now on homeschooling have indicated that homeschooling can be categorized into five themes based on the factors for selection of homeschooling by parents (Barratt-Peacock, 1997; Beirne, 1994; Broadhurst, 1999; Chapman & O'Donoghue, 2000). The themes are student achievement (Harding, 2003, 2006), student competence and social development (Baldwin, 1993; Barratt-Peacock, 1997), students with special needs (French, Walker, Shore, & Bruce, 2011; Jackson, 2009), and law and policies related to homeschooling (Allan & Jackson, 2010p, 2010b; Neuman & Aviram, 2003). In addition several other themes have been focused on by researchers abroad.

For example, Bashan, Merrifield, and Hepburn (2007) found that parents in Canada and the United States choose homeschooling to educate their children for the opportunity to instill moral values and religious beliefs which they allege that the mainstream schools neglect in the children's education.

In Malaysia, research on homeschooling is still limited. Ebinezar's study (2008) showed that Malaysian parents choose homeschooling due to perception that the school's mainstream curriculum is less sound, inefficient and that teaching and learning practices in the mainstream schools were not aligned with family values.

An analysis of journal articles related to education abroad on homeschooling shows it has potential for development in Malaysia in the near future (Ruslina et. al., 2012; Ruslina Ibrahim, Yusliza Darman, Deny Indahsari, Saedah Siraj & Norlidah Alias, 2011; Zainuddin Abu Bakar, Zainuddin Zainal Abidin, Halijah Ibrahin, Asha Hasnimy Mohd Hashim & Fakrul Anwar Khalil, 2012).

Homeschooling is growing popular among parents who are concerned about the quality of education and those who keep their children away from school because of social issues and what they believe to be the inefficient mainstream education system. The reason for this trend is also the lack of quality teachers in the education system.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Teacher Demand-Supply Model proposed by Cheng (2013) was adapted as a theoretical model in this study. The Teacher Demand-Supply Model consists of four main areas of study which are 'Improvement', 'Replacement', 'Initiation' and 'Empowerment' showing the process involved in the System Maintenance Oriented and Education Change Oriented toward quantity and quality of the teacher services, as illustrated in Figure 1.
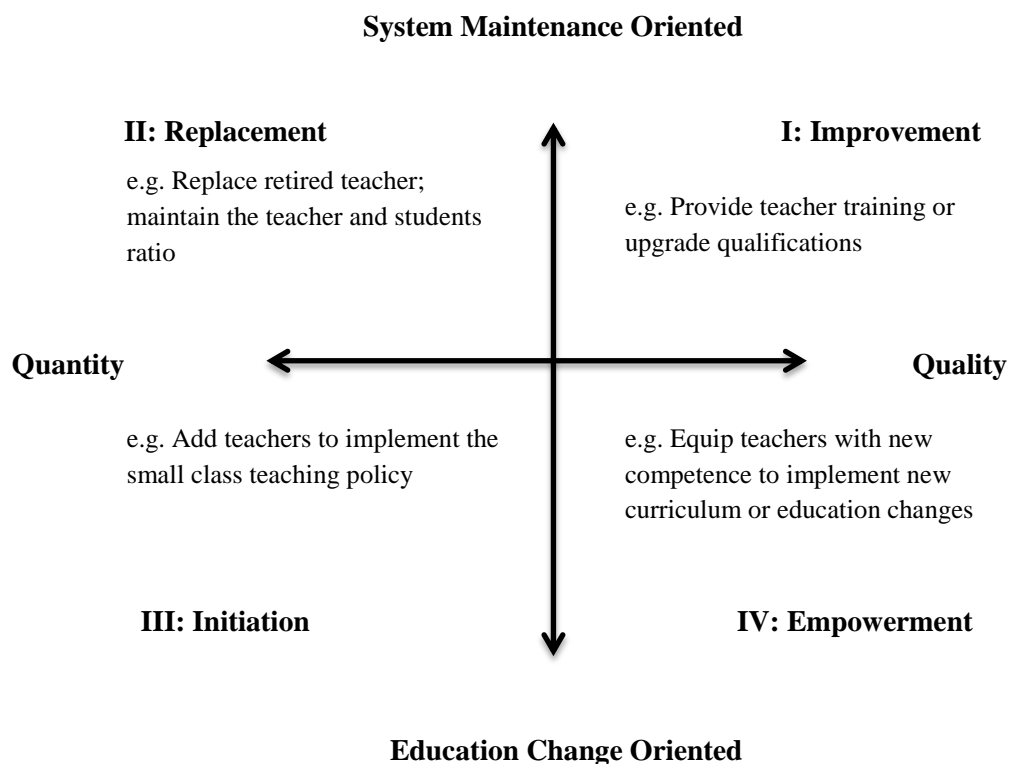

System Maintenance Oriented

II: Replacement

e.g. Replace retired teacher; maintain the teacher and students ratio

I: Improvement

e.g. Provide teacher training or upgrade qualifications

Quantity

e.g. Add teachers to implement the small class teaching policy

Quality

e.g. Equip teachers with new competence to implement new curriculum or education changes

III: Initiation

IV: Empowerment

Education Change Oriented

Figure 1. Model of Teacher Demand-Supply (Source: Cheng, 2013)

This study is focusing on the Empowerment area which involves teacher services. The implementation of homeschooling demands new types of teacher services. For example, homeschooling parents need help from a personal tutor to teach a specific subject which they have not mastered. In other words, empowerment means to equip teachers with a new competence to implement new curriculum or education changes such as homeschooling.

Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM) Methodology

ISM is a computer-based methodology to interpret the learning process to allow individuals or groups to develop a model or map of the relationship between the elements involved in a complex issue based on practical experience and expert knowledge. The ISM methodology is also used to identify and analyse the relationships between specific variables to define a problem or issue in a complex hierarchical structure model (Janes, 1988; Sage, 1977; Warfield, 1974; Warfield & Perino, 1999).

The ISM approach was first applied widely to solve complex issues in the areas of economy, particularly in consultancy (Chang & Hong, 2012; Kaliyan, Govindan, Noorul Haq & Yong, 2013). In addition, ISM has been used in the technical and engineering areas (Han & Tan, 2008; Sigari Tabrizi, Yeap Peik Foong, & Ebrahimi, 2010).

However, there are still limited studies using the ISM approach in the field of education. Warfield (2009) has applied ISM in planning a higher education program while Mohd Nazri Abdul Rahman, Norlidah Alias, Saedah Siraj and Dorothy DeWitt (2013) have applied it in a study related to the transformation of textbook content in Malaysia.

Applications of the Interpretive Structural Modelling Approach

This study is aimed at designing a Factor Selection Model of homeschooling in Malaysia. The objective is to identify the relationships between the elements involved in the selection of homeschooling among parents in Malaysia.

There are some limitations in the application of the ISM methodology; contextual relationships between the elements are dependent on the knowledge, expertise and experience of lecturers and parents who practice homeschooling might not be efficiently well. Hence, the elements considered in the constructed model will be influenced by individual bias.

The procedures for Interpretive Structural Modelling methodology are:

Step 1: The group of 15 experts consisting of 10 parents who practice homeschooling (a minimum of 5 years' experience), a lecturer of the Institute of Teacher Education (Child Development Specialization), a university lecturer (specialist in curriculum), an officer from the Division of Research and Policy Development (EPRD). The experts identify and list the elements that influence the selection of homeschooling among parents in Malaysia through the idea writing technique. This technique of "group brainstorming" is used to screen and shortlist the elements for selection. As a result the experts reached consensus on only six most important elements influencing the selection of homeschooling by parents in the Malaysian context.

Step 2: Design and Development of Factor Selection Model's of Homeschooling using the Interpretive Structural Modelling (ISM) application. By using ISM applications, The Factor Selection Model of homeschooling developed by expert consensus is obtained as shown in Figure 2.
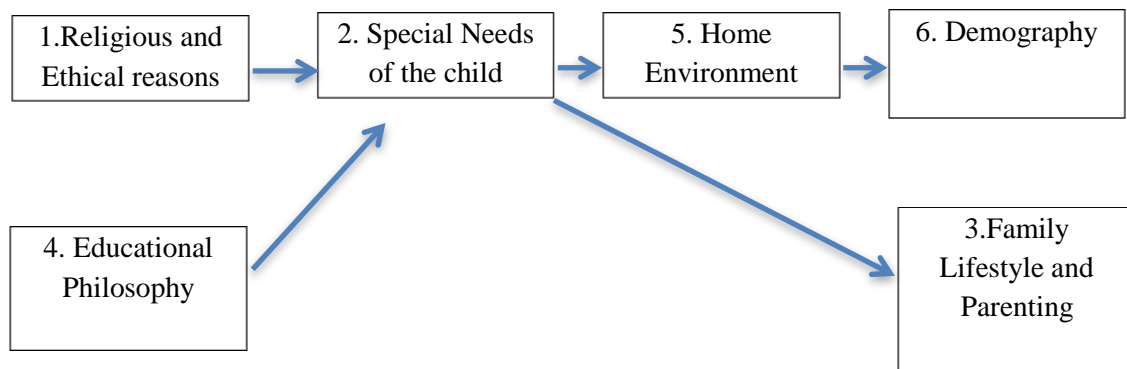
Figure 2. Interpretive Structural Model - Factor Selection Model of Homeschooling in Malaysia

Step 3: The final step is that the Factor Selection Model of homeschooling (Figure 2) is displayed for a feedback session among the experts to examine and review the concepts, elements and facts to determine its suitability. If necessary, modifications to the model can be done through expert consensus. After discussions and arguments over every relationship between the elements, the expert group can reach a consensus to accept the presented model with or without modifications.

Implications of the Factor Selection Model of Homeschooling on Teacher Services

The structural equations, variables and the level of each element as displayed in a visual form through ISM Hierarchical Structural Models (Warfield, 1976) increases the knowledge for the development of curriculum and policies for implementation as the most dominant elements influencing the choice of homeschooling by parents in Malaysia can be determined. This will form the push factor for the mainstream education system. The implications of homeschooling for teacher services can be detailed as follows:

Growth in Homeschooling

An alternative education system in particular homeschooling began to be accepted by society in Malaysia even when the policy governing homeschooling was not yet clear. The number of parents who choose homeschooling has increased despite the enactment of the Compulsory and Free Education Act in 2002. As of 2012, it is estimated that almost 10,000 children in Malaysia have been homeschooled (Soon & Chong, 2013). The implication for teacher services is that an increase in private tutors or teachers is required. This is more so when parents do not have a Basic Teaching Certificate or its equivalent, in accordance with the criteria of homeschooling stipulated in The Professional Circular Bil.14/2002: Compulsory Primary Education.

Organizational Change

Changes in the mainstream schools' organization have taken place in tandem with the growth of homeschooling. The acceptance of homeschooling as an alternative form of organization will mean that there may be changes in the homeschooling curriculum which is influenced by mainstream schools. An example is in Florida and Iowa, where homeschooled children follow sports, music, and do laboratory experiments and other science curriculum and co-curricular activities similar to that offered in public schools (Bauman, 2001; Farris, 1997). The implication is that the teacher-pupil ratio in homeschooled communities is much lower than

in mainstream schools. However, the truth is that as a result of homeschooling, teacher services for teachers in the field of extracurricular, curriculum and other specialist services similar to mainstream schools will increase.

New Institutions

Homeschooling will trigger the birth of new institutions in the country's education system. Non-governmental bodies, private companies and even individuals offering various forms of educational services to parents who carry out such homeschooling, for example, Homeschooling Center, Unschooling For Homeschooling, Homeschool Family Place and Tutorial Center. Educational services offered to parents include distance education, overseas curriculum consultants and trainers as well as private tutors for certain subjects. The existence of these new institutions will have an impact on the services of trained teachers and professionals to meet the educational needs of homeschooling.

Design of Teacher Training

Based on the factor selection model of Homeschooling in Malaysia, elements which dominate the selection of homeschooling among parents in Malaysia are factors : Religious beliefs and adoption of moral values, and Philosophy of education. Parents feel the mainstream schools today emphasize less on these two aspects. The impact for teacher services is that the focus should be on instilling the National Education Philosophy (Falsafah Pendidikan Kebangsaan) instead of an examination-oriented education. Emphasis should also be given to including self-esteem and professional character building through religious and moral values for training teachers, in order to support the concept of the teaching career as a vocation, rather than earning a salary.

Requirements and Skills for Future Teachers

The Factor Selection Model of homeschooling in Malaysia (Figure 2) also identified the element (2) related to children with special needs as a dominant factor. Special needs is not limited to gifted children and children with learning disabilities, but also covers needs of normal children, such as emotional and physical needs, as well as the readiness to follow the mainstream school. Based on this need, the demand for homeschooling is increasing. The impact is on teacher efficiency and requirement. Mainstream teachers' skills should be enhanced, particularly in spiritual development and technology skills. This is to cater to the influence and impact of homeschooling on establishing a collaborative and dynamic curriculum to offer mainstream schools.

Homeschooling Curriculum Policy

Although elements (3) Family Lifestyle and Family Bonding, and element (6) Demographics appear at level 3 in the Factors Selection Model of Homeschooling in Malaysia, it does not mean that these two elements do not have an impact on the demand-supply of teachers. These elements trigger a new phenomenon in the curriculum design of homeschooling, which is distance education. The importance of homeschooling has increased the demand for and the supply of recognized and accredited courses for certification at diploma, degree and post-degree levels in education over the internet. The impact of this curriculum is on policy makers as well as the implementers of the homeschooling curriculum for an appropriate curriculum to meet the educational needs of homeschoolers. The supply-and-demand for qualified teachers and experienced professionals to meet this requirement must be generated to ensure that this generation of homeschoolers meet the educational aspirations of the country, especially nationalism and national identity.

CONCLUSION

Homeschooling offers an alternative choice for parents concerned about the formation of the child's spiritual, physical and academic needs. Through proper pedagogical practices, parents who have grievances against the mainstream education system can ensure their chidlren are educated (Collom, 2005; Ruslina et.al., 2012; Ebinezar, 2008; Mohd Nazri et.al., 2012). Teacher services need to be planned carefully to meet the educational needs of homeschooling in Malaysia.

The existence of alternative education today has impacted mainstream education in terms of curriculum implementation or the enrolment in schools. The different forms of technology tools can accelerate the evolution of homeschooling based on the sharing of information, expertise and by providing platforms for implementing activities in a collaborative teaching and learning environment for homeschoolers. Hence the impact of homeschooling on the services of teachers in the present and future, not only transforms the dimension of teaching services but also demands a change in the patterns and organizational of responsibilities of teachers in mainstream schools.

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