Homeschooling in Secler Region, Romania

*Kinga Magdolna Mandel**

Received: November 5, 2019; received in revised form: January 31, 2020;
accepted: February 10, 2020

Abstract:

Introduction: In the presented article, we are looking for the solutions and challenges of homeschooling in terms of further education and labour market inclusion.

Purpose: The purpose of the paper is to discuss the conceptual framework of a research-initiative on homeschooling. What are the consequences? Because of a lack of adequate state language usage, is there a forced migration in the pupils' career paths? To what extent are homeschoolers included into traditional compulsory education, lifelong learning, the labor market, and the society?

Methods: This is a paper with the conceptual framework of a research, where snowball sampling based qualitative interviews are planned.

Results: From the research to be conducted, the authors expect a reliable picture of the causes, challenges and consequences of homeschooling on lifelong learning, the labour market and social inclusion.

Discussion: It seems that homeschooling in the Seclerland is a de-schooling solution, because it is usually opted by parents dissatisfied with the quality of education. It helps them avoid Romanian language tests of skills and maturity examinations. We assume that those with outstanding competencies (e.g. in music or sports) or those with a certain handicap (e.g. health problems), as well as those temporarily living abroad are choosing it. It can be a sort of forced solution, a self-defense strategy that protects students from increasing school conflicts, and a reaction to the lack of satisfactory educational offers, commuting, or school segregation.

Limitations: Limitations of research are due to the snowball sample method and time/money limits.

Conclusions: We hope that, above all, the results will help parents to take a wise decision on whether to choose this option or not, but also schools and decision makers in education to assess their roles in the process and make changes if they want to and can do so.

Key words: homeschooling, inclusion, lifelong learning, higher education, labour market, Secler-region.

* Kinga Magdolna Mandel, ELTE PPK Institute of Research on Adult Education and Knowledge Management, Budapest, Hungary; mandel.kinga@ppk.elte.hu

1 Homeschooling

According to the definition, homeschooling is a parent-led home-based education, sometimes also called home-education (Ray, 2017). Domestic education, home based education and home education are synonyms used for homeschooling. The lay public sometimes confuses homeschooling with private education or extracurricular private classes. The difference is that in homeschooling, mainly the parents play the role of a teacher - whether with or without a pedagogical background, while in private education, professional teachers are involved. Similarly, in the case of private classes (tutoring), professional teachers are giving classes in addition to that offered by the schools. In the case of homeschooling, children do not attend schools on a daily basis, they only do so at the end of a semester or for end of year examinations. However, homeschooled students also often take private classes in music, sports or other sciences that their parents are not confident in, or they better ask for professional assistance. Homeschooling is sometimes confused with unschooling. The difference is in the approach towards learning. In homeschooling, parents act like teachers in the classroom. Unschooling is based on children's natural curiosity and follows their interests in their own way (Miller, 2014), sometimes using the natural intergenerational learning possibilities (Simándi, 2018). In this study, we focus on homeschooling.

2 Reasoning

Studying homeschooling is important because already the 2001 report issued by the OECD Secretariat on the future of education, in Scenario 5, portrayed the future school as a school without a school, replaced by student networks and profound dissatisfaction with institutionalized education. In the description of the scenario, special attention was paid to the undergoing expansion of home education (OECD, 2001, p. 93).

In 2016, there were over 2.3 million homeschooled students in the United States. One decade ago, it was perceived as an "alternative" but now, it is bordering on "mainstream" in the United States. Home-based education has also been growing around the world in many other countries (e.g., Australia, Canada, France, Hungary, Japan, Kenya, Russia, Mexico, South Korea, Thailand, and the United Kingdom) (Ray, 2015).

This phenomenon is spreading in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries as well, with Romania being amongst them. Based on the 2015 data by the Romanian Association of Homeschoolers, 300 families were involved in homeschooling in Romania, amongst them 30 being Hungarian families.

During our previous studies on the Romanian minority education (Mandel 2007, Mandel 2016), we encountered this phenomenon to be spreading in the Secler region in Romania - among Hungarian families as well. This made us curious to detect the causes of homeschooling and possible consequences regarding higher

education or lifelong learning opportunities, the labour market and social inclusion.

Ray (2017), after analysing the American scientific literature on homeschooling, recommended to examine adults who were homeschooled in terms of their array of knowledge, attitudes and behaviours regarding lifelong learning, rates of public welfare dependency, and the degree of personal agency or self-efficacy. Similarly, in our research, alongside with the causes of homeschooling, we focus on its consequences on inclusion.

3 Research questions

What are the causes of homeschooling in Romania and in the Secler-region? How measurable is this phenomenon? Is it spreading over time? Who are choosing it? What are the costs of it? What are the consequences? What lifelong learning, labour market and life opportunities does homeschooling background provide? What are the perceptions of individuals that were homeschooled and their parents, grandparents regarding inclusion?

4 Hypotheses

We expect that the causes include dissatisfaction with the quality of education, lack of private and alternative education offers in the educational market, a systematic disadvantage of Hungarian students in state language exams, struggling and unhappy kids and families because of the school system, and the state of arts in compulsory education.

Probably, it is difficult to estimate and measure the total population involved. Based on the growing number of articles that we encounter on Internet related to the issue, we deem that the phenomenon is spreading.

Regarding the group of people involved, we suppose that there are two different groups of people involved. There are those that sociologically could be described as highly educated, wealthy families, with postmodern ethics (conservative - Christian, liberal), dissatisfied with the educational offers and quality, trying to offer their kids the best education possible, with gifted or talented kids (in sport, music or other fields), and trying to protect their kids from possible school conflicts, bullying.

The group at the other end of the spectrum is, that carry out homeschooling not because they want to, but because they have to, they have no other choice, they are pushed out from school because of their child's behaviour or educational issues, they do not have sufficient resources and live in poverty. We suppose that homeschooling is requires higher investments as the mainstream one, if the aim of the family is to provide their children with a higher education career. Otherwise, it is less costly and less efficient.

We presume that homeschooling offers two different learning and career paths. For those living in wealthy conditions, homeschooling leads to a higher

education institution usually in a foreign country, which is probably the same country or at least a same language speaking country, where the children were taking exams regularly to finish the compulsory schools. Furthermore, we suppose that because of the lack of Romanian language knowledge, they follow a career in the country - or a same language speaking country - where they finished their universities.

In the case of socially disadvantaged children, we presume that the homeschooling is not leading to any further lifelong learning. Those students remain disadvantaged in the labour market as well; they earn their living from casual work.

Regarding the perceptions, we expect that the children and parents who opted for homeschooling voluntarily, are satisfied with its results, whereas those who had no other choice, are not.

5 Research methods

In the planned research, individual and group interviews with homeschooling families, parents, grandparents, children, teachers and schoolmasters involved in the process will be carried out.

We will use the snowball method of sampling, starting from the Romanian Homeschooling Association and its members. We suppose that it would be difficult to study homeschoolers from poor families, therefore, we intend to reach them through schools and social institutions.

6 History of homeschooling from religious roots to postmodern lifestyle

The history of homeschooling goes back to the ancient times. However, in medieval ages, it was a privilege of the rich and of gifted (e.g. Edison), and it remained so for a long time. In the United States, it was common in the 1600s and 1700s. During the colonial period in the United States, the family - i.e. parents and siblings - was the normal, foundational, and predominant educational environment for most children (Gordon & Gordon, 1990).

7 Laws regarding homeschooling

There is no private student status in the Romanian educational system. Only children with disabilities have the right to study at home. However, a home-educated student could be registered at a foreign educational institution (usually in Hungary or the USA) and the diploma issued by those institutions can be accredited in Romania. The European Free Education Forum supports homeschooling (Romanian Homeschooling Association, 2019).

8 Target group: Who are opting for homeschooling?

A wide variety of people choose to homeschool their children. People with different beliefs (atheists, Christians, and Mormons), with a range of political orientations (conservatives, libertarians, and liberals), with different income (low-, middle-, and high-income families), of different origins (Black Hispanic, and White), with different educational backgrounds (parents with Ph.D., GEDs, and no high-school diplomas). One study shows that in the USA, 32% of homeschooled students are Black, Asian, Hispanic, etc. (i.e., not White/non-Hispanic) (Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2013; as cited in Ray, 2019).

In the USA the majority (62%) of students live in cities and suburban areas, 20% of students were categorized as “poor” and the other 80% were classified as “non-poor.” Regarding their parents’ highest education level, 32% had a high school diploma or lower, while 14% had attended graduate or professional schools. According to a national survey, the majority of homeschooling families are very close to median income (Ray, 2017).

9 Causes of homeschooling - push and pull factors

In the USA, most parents mentioned among the causes of homeschooling “safety”, “drugs”, or “negative peer pressure” in schools (91%). Others indicated “a desire to provide moral instruction” (77%), “a dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools” (74%) and “a desire to provide religious instruction” (64%) (Redford et al., 2017).

In other research, Montes (2006) found out that parents believe they can provide their children with a better education (47%) and others opted for homeschooling for religious reasons (41%).

As much as 40% of African-American parents choose homeschooling in order to “give the child more instruction on African-American/black culture and history” and 20% indicated the “desire to avoid racism in public schools.” (Ray, 2015).

Fields-Smith and Kisura (2013) reported that parents opted for it because “homeschooling also allowed them to ‘slow down’ their children’s exposure to what could be deemed as unsavoury elements of school socialization (e.g. racism, violence, drugs, etc.)”.

There are several benefits that homeschooling brings - e.g. parental responsibility, control in character-formation of children, direct value transfer, protection of children from the effects that they are not prepared for, etc. Among other advantages, overpassing the generational gap, possibility to give personalized, differentiated education, and more emphasis placed on the interest of children can be mentioned. Furthermore, effective and real evaluation of performance, competence based education, real world settings, more results in shorter time devoted to learning, flexibility - i.e. educational freedom - can be observed (Szász, 2015). Studies also accentuate that homeschooling leads to a

lifestyle change, causing less time devoted to learning (where learning is not only happening at home, but in the shop, museum, cultural and other events) and more to playing, better results are achieved, children experience a better, happier childhood with reduced stress, more creativity, more personal fulfilment, and a new postmodern life-style (<https://www.calverteducation.com/should-i-homeschool/homeschooling-pros-and-cons>).

Parents opt for homeschooling to customize or individualize the curriculum and learning environment for each child, to accomplish more academically than in schools, to use pedagogical approaches other than those typical in institutional schools, to enhance family relationships between children and parents and among siblings. Furthermore, to provide guided and reasoned social interactions with youthful peers and adults, to provide a safer environment for children and youth, because of physical violence, drugs and alcohol, psychological abuse, racism, and improper and unhealthy sexuality associated with institutional schools, and teach and impart a particular set of values, beliefs, and worldview to children and youth (Ray, 2019).

Ray (2017) stated that the majority of peer-reviewed studies on academic achievement reveal a positive effect for the homeschooled students compared to institutionally-schooled students, while a few studies show mixed or negative results. Regarding social and emotional development, a majority of studies show clearly positive outcomes for the homeschooled compared to those in conventional schools. A majority of the studies on the relative success of the home educated in their adulthood show positive outcomes for the homeschooled compared to those who had been in conventional schools.

Numerous studies today proved, especially in the American context, that homeschooled students are not behind their peers in terms of learning or social skills, and in many cases are ahead of them (Nelsen, 1998; Ray, 1997; Romanowsky, 2006; Rudner, 1998).

The cons of homeschooling mentioned in several studies and among the lay public are that it requires more time and money investment from the parents that could have less time for work and themselves. In the USA, homeschooling families spend an average of \$600 per student annually on their education (Ray, 2019). Others include difficulties in social interactions, or the challenge to connect or relate with others, the problems arising from the mixture of parent-teacher roles, the ban on join the school sport teams. However, some studies get contrary results regarding some of those elements as well.

“The home-educated are doing well, typically above average, on measures of social, emotional, and psychological development: peer interaction, self-concept, leadership skills, family cohesion, participation in community service, and self-esteem. Homeschool students are regularly engaged in social and educational activities outside their homes and with people other than their nuclear family members. They are commonly involved in activities such as field trips, scouting, political drives, church ministry, sports teams, and community

volunteer work.” (Ray, 2019) “Homeschooled adolescents are less likely to drink alcohol and, if they do, less likely to get drunk than their public and private high school counterparts.” (Thomson & Jang, 2016).

10 Consequences of homeschooling

According to available studies, home-educated students score 15 to 30 percentile points above public-school students on standardized academic achievement tests. Furthermore, a 2015 study found Black homeschool students to be scoring 23 to 42 percentile points above Black public school students (Ray, 2015).

Other researchers found out that children from structured homeschool settings outperformed their conventional school peers, while children from unstructured homeschooling underperformed the institutional school students (Martin-Chang, Gould, & Meuse, 2011).

Curcubet (2015) claims that homeschooled children have the same opportunities to follow studies in higher education than their peers. They also perform well in their higher education studies, according to Cogan (2010). College students who were homeschooled earned higher first-year and fourth-year results. Further, there were no differences between homeschooled students’ fall-to-fall retention and four-year graduation rates when compared with conventionally educated students.

What is interesting, Cheng (2014) also found that “those with more exposure to homeschooling relative to public schooling tend to be more politically tolerant.”

11 Expected results of the research

Through the research results, we expect to get a more scientifically sustained and reliable picture of the causes, challenges and consequences of homeschooling. We hope that that the findings will above all help parents to take a wise decision on whether to choose this option or not, then schools and decision makers in education to assess their roles in the process and make changes if they want to and can do so.

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