

The Context and Sustainability of Social Identity of a Homeschool Group in Thailand

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The research objectives were to study the advantages of homeschool group, its context and identities. In this study, qualitative research methodology was employed. Key informants were mainly parents from 7 families attending one homeschool group in Bangkok, Thailand. Four advantages of homeschool group emerged in the focus group discussions of homeschool parents in this group-resource sharing, social skills, adequate number of the learners and opportunity to learn with other children. In terms of the context, this group was established by a group of parents who had their child(ren) study at the same kindergarten. Parents and Mr. Tim (alias; a consultant) played the role of teachers. Additionally, the environment of the place for learning seemed useful and appropriate for children to learn. From the aspect of social identity, the parents' identities related to the home school group were child-centered, thinking out of the box and trusting one another. The process of identity formation started with collecting experiences before selecting the right ones, and then connecting them to their own personal philosophy. This process also included taking feedbacks from social environment that supported this, as the feedbacks could convince that all identities were authentic. The conditions that helped sustain these identities were influences from media, having well-established relationship with the other members of the group, attaining sufficient social support and perceiving children's advancement.

Keywords: socialization, identity formation, sustainability of identity

The review of research studies about homeschools in Thailand revealed that the education system had inadequate ability to enhance students' learning performance but focused only on academic competition. Spoon-feeding system was available mainly as the teaching strategy and it negatively affected the Thai youth (Kritiyapichartkul, 2003). Besides, being in conventional schools, shortened the time of being with family. Moreover, conventional schools had monopoly in education in Thailand. To clarify, the failure of Thai education system was that the system converted the simple explanation to become mysterious and difficult to comprehend (Kaewdang, 1998). The curricula and teaching methods influenced the students' physical and mental health adversely, as they had to finish large amount of homework. Consequently, they got bored and in some cases, they acted aggressively with their family members. Unfortunately, drug abuse was also an unsolvable issue due to the lack of teachers' ability to take care of them thoroughly (Pintavanich, 2000).

Even though schools are the major places for educating children, family seems to be more influential since it is the first social institute for educating children. A family is approved as an efficient entity to bring up children. In 2000, The National Economic and Social Development in Thailand launched the plan of educational reform, as its principal objective was to provide parents, family, community and locality with the rights to cooperate

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in educating children. After this act of legislation was launched, homeschool has become more popular and more parents believe a family has the potential to socialize children. They have the actual rights to be their children's educators. According to Nakornthap (2000) "One of the basic beliefs of human rights that the government should persist in is to comprehend that they never have the entire rights or power to impel children to be educated by only the curricula set by the government since children are not theirs. The absolute unit to take the responsibility for preparing these children to become good social members is family". Hence, this reflects the importance of the role of the family as a socialization agent.

From the pilot study the researcher conducted formerly on a few privately homeschooled children, the result seemed dissatisfying because the children had few opportunities to be socialized by any other agents rather than their parents. After visiting one homeschool group in Bangkok, countless questions had arisen for example; Why the members of the group especially children looked more lively than ones homeschooled privately at home? After this, the researcher chose to visit and observe one homeschool group and had seen something that could hold all the members together that were very different from homeschooled privately by parents. This homeschool group had been under observation for 3 weeks before being selected as the case for study. For this observation, the researcher key informants were the parents who had homeschooled their children privately at home in a homeschool group. The cooperation among parents in this group was more interesting. They themselves planned the lessons based on children's interests. Besides, this homeschool group never focused on intensive contents. The parents in the group were the main teachers in various subjects. Providing the education by parents is precise concept of real homeschool. Also, conducting the research on the context and self-identity of the group could help general parents or related personnel appreciate another alternative in education. which could be appropriate for Thai children in this rapidly changing world. Further, the result could be utilized in order to improve the further learning of children with the assistance of their own parents.

Objectives

The objectives of this research were to study the context of one homeschool group in Bangkok, its advantages, and to study the social identity, and the sustainability of this identity among the members of this group.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The concept of homeschool of became popular in Thailand since the government offered parents the rights to prepare the education for their own child(ren). Afterwards, there were many scholars who defined the word "homeschool". It is teaching activities considerably planned for children in the family and most activities have been set in the household context in which parents play the role of teachers to conduct those creative activities (Nakornthap, 2000). Additionally, Chalermchai (2000) defined that homeschool provides one type of education in which parents take total responsibility to educate their children instead of sending them to conventional schools.

According to Ray (1992), western European and American parents have been provided with the rights to teach their children at home since 1500s. However, in 1925, American

government faced a controversy that parents could not detain their children at home and teach them as well. As a result of court sentence, the parents recovered finally. The verdict of the court said that the basic belief government should realize that it had no right to socialize children by compelling them to attend only their prepared institutes or academies. Significantly, parents who had brought them up could attain the rights to be responsible for preparing children to be appropriate social members (Nakornthap, 2000).

To walk with the modern world, Thai parents these days tend to get interested in other informal education systems like homeschool. To make the decision, some personal backgrounds of these parents are the major keys to unlock the question “Why are they interested in homeschool?” Socialization is the trigger to disclose whatever influences their decision-making. As socialization is the lifelong process to lead children becomes appropriate social members, it is the concept broadly used in order to analyze social phenomena because it is the process of learning social standards, social values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and the appropriate roles of ones in diverse social positions (Michener and Delamater 1999: 46). From the definition, the decision making of homeschool parents for setting up homeschool was partially influenced by this concept of socialization.

In the matter of groups, socialization is capable of creating culture and society that means group members can be persuaded intentionally by any condition in the group. Consequently, social norm or value would become individuals' due to socialization. Certain agents including other parents with the same educational beliefs, concepts or attitudes have socialized homeschool parents. This social interaction allows them to collect experiences, which can help parents and group to create identities. To illustrate, all attained information and experiences that these parents have gained from participating in the group or any other agents such as media, family, and persons around are elaborately filtered in order to finally become the group's identities via symbols. The Symbolic Interaction Theory states that the contents of socialization are negotiable. Most socialized persons never consent all they have got in the first place but they have culled, negotiated and adapted these experiences to fit their lives (Sawasdipong, 1989).

The identity formation was one of major issues in the current research study. Its definitions are varied. Ramitanon (2002) stated that self-identity is something making individuals feel identical or different from others. It is not necessary for individuals to have only one identity but there are more than one to help create human being. Self identity is not formed naturally however, it is commonly from social construct as it is resulted from the sum of self structure which can be transformed relying on roles, responsibilities, values, and experiences. According to one article, self-image, self-concept, and self-identity revisited by Bailey (2003), self identity comprises numerous compositions that try to answer the question “Who am I?” also “What one is?” in order to be separated from others. This homeschool group had gathered massive experiences influenced by their families, schools, communities, and workplaces. Additionally, they were particularly called into experiences from this group. According to the Social Identity Theory developed by Tajfel and Turner (1986), minimal conditions are needed for leading people in a group to discriminate themselves as ingroup or against outgroup. As each individual may have more than one social identities because of different contexts, he tries to display ingroup favoritism in order to achieve self-esteem by positively differentiating their ingroup from the others. It is likely that the homeschool parents' identities could have been formed especially through their interaction as a part of the group. Thus, the members' identity seems interesting to be studied since a sense of

homeschool group's identity could maintain and strengthen the bonds between the role of parents and the role of educators.

The Ecological System theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains that there are significant connections between individuals and environments. Five systems consisting of microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, can indicate the connection of each level, and is capable of leading them to present certain behaviors. All of these can be used to explain phenomena of this research study because homeschool parents are mostly involved in social, cultural, environmental, and religious activities. Interestingly, one famous psychologist, Albert Bandura (1977), whose Social Learning theory posits that people's behavior has an interaction with personal factors and environmental factors coincides with the Ecological System theory mentioned above. His theory illustrates that people learn from one another with the assistance of observation, imitation, and modeling. As Bandura said "Most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action." Thus it is convincing that the Observational Learning Theory of Bandura is a powerful way to lead individuals perform any behavior. To depict, most homeschool parents provided themselves with prospects to learn and experience any other homeschool parents even alternative schools where offer most things in the same way of homeschool concepts. Hence, the Social Learning theory is likely to pose reasonable explanation for these parents' behaviors.

The conceptual framework has been generated from the literature review. Socialization is one of the keys to propel homeschool parents to make their decision and be intentional in the position as homeschoolers. Besides, ecological system Theory has a powerful capability to provide any explanations of related systems influencing human development. All five systems reflect how homeschool parents in the group are shaped and how they react to those concerned environments. Likewise, conducting research on their inner factors like cognition and self-identity plays substantial roles to discover any other interesting findings on account of the parents' change in cognitive process. Importantly, self-identity of the member of this homeschool group is worth learning because there are some hidden facts that can explain homeschool group's phenomena.

Methodology

This research was a qualitative research based on the case study method, which attempted to determine the context of one homeschool group in Bangkok. This research method was used to study social identity of the group members. According to Yin (2003), case study is the empirical inquiry method for studying contemporary phenomena occurring in one certain time and context that means the researchers want to investigate or examine some actual phenomena at the certain time without discriminating them from the context or without controlling the external factors. This methodology was suitable for this research study since all phenomena were learned and observed naturally. The researcher used an inductive reasoning to conduct this research. The focus was directly on what the researcher wanted to know with specific time and space. In-depth interview, observation, group interview, and focus group discussion were chosen as the methods of data collection in this research study.

Participants

The participants were parents from 7 families who were in one homeschool group in Bangkok. This homeschool group held suitable qualifications such as spacious learning environment, authentic homeschool concepts, and planned curriculum set by the parents. Over and above, minor key informants were included in this research for triangulation. Also, the information from these informants was utilized to strengthen the research validity.

Procedure

This study was based on the intrinsic case study method, which is one of the case selection procedures. Intrinsic case study is based on the researchers' personal interest and intention to study and reveal the phenomena of the case without any other objective (Stake, 2000). With the help of snowball technique, the homeschool group was chosen among those other homeschool groups. As data collection in qualitative way is varied, in-depth interview, observation, group interview, and focus group discussion had been used and there were some sample questions as well. Related and specific questions for the interview were on the topics of key informants' backgrounds, ways of life, decision-making, attitudes towards homeschool, and homeschool experience. Additionally, in the aspect of observation, the researcher took part in the field in order to observe the environmental settings including specific teaching styles. Learning from evidences like photographs and worksheet, as secondary sources were very useful in the name of precise data. The researcher furthermore participated in any other activities such as sport event and camping. Voice recorder, paper, pen, notebook, and camera were utilized as the data collection tools.

Readiness Preparation

Before conducting this research, the researcher had initially conducted the pilot study in order to find the actually interesting research topic, however; all three homeschool families were not any representative in any groups but privately set homeschool for their children. After acquiring the certain topic, the researcher had an opportunity to homeschool one boy. Fully 2 months spent on the role of homeschooler for a 12-year-old boy, the researcher had understood more about the topic conducted. Importantly, it did not matter whichever roles the researcher took, the situations could assist the researcher not to be bias and not to be persuaded by the any issue because of the practice of "bracketing", which is very significant character of qualitative researchers. Consequently, the readiness had existed for holding a role of qualitative researcher.

Data Collecting and Analysis

In the first step of data collection, the researcher needed to make a rapport with the key informants by self-introduction and informing them about the purposes of the research study. were made create a relaxing climate, where natural conversations could take place. After obtaining information by in-depth interview, observation, group interview, and focus group discussion, all the data was organized to be in order. Next, data display was the outcome of analysis which could represent the phenomena. Finally, conclusion, interpretation, and verification were all done to ascertain the research findings.

Research Findings

The Context of the Group

Research findings were divided into 3 elements as the first part was about the context of the homeschool group. This group was established by a group of parents who had their child(ren) study at the same kindergarten located in suburban area with alternative concepts. The group's administration seemed flexible. With the consistency in homeschool concepts, parents played a pivotal role not only a role of group educators but also administrators. Mr. Tim (alias) was the core of the group. He had held various roles namely a consultant, teacher, and lesson planner. The physical environment of the school was suitable and could encourage the children to learn effectively.



Figure 1. Learning area of the homeschool group

From figure1, the house had been used as a school with adequate spaces and learning materials. To illustrate, spacious front yard and middle-sized pond were the place for both learning and relaxation. The curricula consisted of 4 major cores-Morality and life skills, Mathematics and languages, World Exploration and Art-music-sport-craft.

Idea sharing was the trigger to propel this homeschool group to move forward. According to one member,

“Before the beginning of each semester, the meeting had been held in order to share whatever each family wanted their child to learn as the parents mostly shared what was really in their child’s favor. All information based on the rights to learn of the children.”

The meeting mentioned before was also held every Friday and the agenda was about lesson plans, fieldtrips and activities, faced problems, and weekly expenses. This can reflect parents’ actual possession of children’s education. As Mr. Tim (alias) said:

“If the parents are the real owner of their children’s education, they can learn everything from their parents. I focus on the inner spirit so there might be a problem if children go forwards or take over their own parents. In Thai education system, the conflict emerges because educational institutes and families are separated that means only schools have to mainly be in charge of raising the children”.

The pattern or core pedagogy depends on philosophy, ideas, attitudes, and values of individual family. It reflects the resilience or flexibility of the ways the parents teach their children by unstructured procedures.

The Advantages of Homeschool Group

Parents’ individual experiences reflected the reasons why these parents trusted the potential of homeschool in the group and four advantages of homeschool in group emerged in focus group discussion-resource sharing, social skills, adequate number of the learners and opportunity to learn with the children.

The first apparent advantage of being homeschool group was resource sharing. The resources included persons, knowledge, money and experience while each parent participated in the group every day. This mentioned point created a strong coherence among parents who were members of this group. According to one parent:

“Homeschooling my children alone seems difficult since my knowledge and network are not enough for socializing my children. However, being group can help me share this point.”

Additionally, joining homeschool group was better than privately homeschooling their children in terms of social skills. Since the children had a chance to interact with others in the group, they could adapt themselves and develop any other social skills such as being team players, learning how to accept being a loser and a winner. Most parents in the group recognized the significance of society in order to shape the children to live their life happily. As one member of the group mentioned:

“The vivid pro of homeschool in group is not being lonely. Gathering into group lets the children have friends to do such activities together. If they were privately homeschooled, the parents might not know how to deal with this problem.”

For adequate number of the learners, being homeschool group sounds superior. Not too many students in the class could facilitate both children and teachers (parents themselves) in most activities because learning in group sounds more enjoyable. The appropriate number could also facilitate teachers to make interesting diverse lesson plans and activities. As Mr. Tim said

“This group is so obvious. It has been crystalized, 20 students is the suitable number.”

Besides, the last advantage of being homeschool group was opportunity to learn with children. In case of private homeschool, parents could learn with their children as well, however; they would not have the prospect to have a connection with other sophisticated homeschool parents. Importantly, learning activities would strengthen relationship between parents and children. Mr. Tim stated:

“One of the advantages is that parents are able to learn with children. They will comprehend what is important for them. Most parents these days never know what their children face with and never know what should be fulfilled but just know how many scores they have got. They do not know what skills their children have or need to be improved. The children also never accept whatever their parents teach or advice.”

From all positive aspects discussed above, they ensured the advantages of homeschool group outweigh private homeschool. Even though privately homeschooling the children had some superior points, attending the group fitted the actual aims of leading the children to be good social members and could survive in diverse situations.

Social Identities of the Homeschool Group

The final part of research findings was about homeschool parents' identity as they were the members. There were three identities: Child-centered, thinking out of the box and trusting one another. Before these parents participated in this grouped homeschool, they had suspended their own identities, which were based on being tired of conventional schools.

The group's identity formation

Figure 2 demonstrates the process of identity formation. To begin, these parents had collected experiences from being socialized by any agents. After that, they tried to select the right experiences in order to apply or fit into their life and beliefs. Then, the parents connected those certain experiences to their personal lifestyles and philosophy before taking feedbacks from social environment supported this, as the feedbacks could convince that all identities were authentic. Identity is meticulous thing that could be transformed or grown throughout individuals' life when they faced diverse experiences. According to the process in figure 2, socialization plays a big deal of creating identities because whatever people have learnt or have been socialized reflects their own identity before obtaining new ones. According to the research of Stryker and Serpe (1987), it found that first-year college students managed their room decoration as same as they had done at home because they wanted to remind themselves and others of their own identity. From this, the accumulated experiences lead to some radical identities. As the parents in this homeschool group selected experiences from social participation and put them into action, they tried to connect their self with the learnt experiences because identity formation is something influenced by self and social entities that Stryker (1980) mentioned that self cannot be separated from the society since self can only exist and be meaningful in its relation with other selves or entities. Additionally, feedbacks were such a crucial concern convincing ones to whether or not they continue their belief.

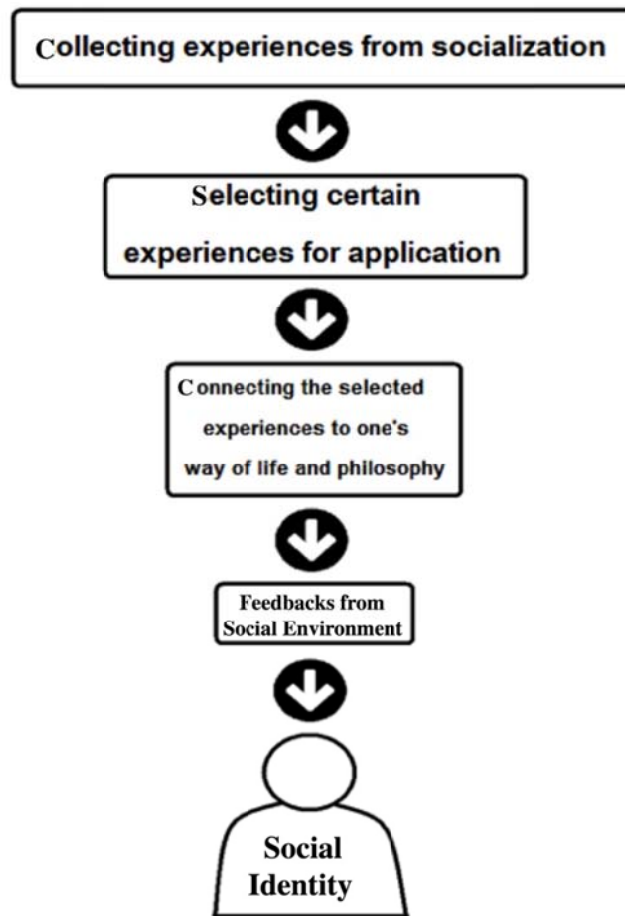


Figure 2. The process of formation of social identity.

The conditions sustaining the group's identities

In this rapidly changing world, these parents could maintain the mentioned identities or not. To ensure the identities were authentic, time and conditions were significant indicators. After 3 months, the researcher visited the group again to observe whatever changes might happen. Decisively, the researcher had found the most interesting key to unlock suspicion that how they could sustain these identities. It was due to the conditions – influences from media, well-established relationships in this group, attaining sufficient social support, and perceiving the children's advancement. One parent said:

“Having seen in media about deteriorated society, we believe that homeschool is the effective way to let them survive in this cruel society.”

Likewise, tightened relationship among the group members could be the measurement that they all still held the same belief and identities as one parent said:

“At first, the sense of group had not yet born in my mind because this was like a new world of mine, however, most things socialize me to be a part of the group; no my child or your child but our child.”

Supported by the social environment, most parents had stronger belief and confidence. It had helped sustain their identities. They were still the part of the group because some educational organizations allowed the parents to register. They stated that Department of Non-formal Education was one of the alternatives, which encouraged homeschooled children to achieve the degrees or certificates. From this, there were numerous possible ways to partake any formal education in the future.

Additionally, perceiving the children's progress was one of the discovered conditions that had a potential to sustain the group's identities as one parents said:

“The children’s positive development can be seen because of being close to them so teaching them strengthens my positive attitudes towards grouped homeschool.”

From above statement, it is irrefutable that these were the crucial conditions for the parents to be willing to hold the same beliefs and sustain the identities.

Discussion

This study aimed to understand the context of one homeschool group in Bangkok and to study social identity of homeschool parents, while they were the members of the group.

In the mean of identity, this homeschool group had accumulated values and experiences for some length of time. For all interactions demonstrated in figure 3, they were ones of the factors that helped create this homeschool group's identities. According to Erickson (1980), identity formation is a life-long process and it can be transformed. Taking some time to form its values that later had become real own identities, this group had confronted with a life-long process as all identities emerged due to what they had learnt. Identity sustainability was an interesting process. This group had reflected the conditions of sustaining the social identities, which were Child-Centered, Thinking Out of the Box and Trusting One Another. From one research, she found that having social interaction could trigger social members to adapt themselves in order to sustain community's specific identities (Phannoi, 2009). There was a coincidence between this explanation and phenomena occurring in the group. To clarify, the conditions that helped sustain its identities were influences from media, well-established relationship in this group, attaining sufficient social support, and perceiving the children's advancement and all of these conditions were the products of social interaction.

Figure 3 demonstrates the relationship among various agents influencing children in the homeschool group via the perspective of Ecological System Theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). This system can reflect whatever the children have experienced and shape their learning competencies and behaviors. In case of homeschool in the form of group, all members played the main role of raising their child that means in all daily activities, these parents spent most of their time teaching, observing, and developing the children so these activities could lead to great daily experiences which could be one key to shape the parents' identities especially during participating in group.

Microsystem

This is the environment the children depended on the most. In this case, their family and the group itself played a significant role of socializing agents. Interestingly, adhering to the family, it sounded sensible that the children had been directly influenced and socialized by them. One remarkable point was that parents spent most time on taking care of the children so they could perceive whatever their children obtained the development as one research study discovered that children encouraged by the parents had intrinsic motivation in learning and intellectual development. Moreover, tough relationship like touching, kissing, singing, and hugging was the key to learning success (Apostoleris, 1999). The opportunity to have social interaction in the group reflected numerous advantages especially in the aspect of social skills, which could lead to children's leadership. Montgomery (1989) found that homeschool children who had more prospects to take part in many kinds of social activities could also enhance leadership.

Mesosystem

To depict the association between the parents and the group, this robust connection was capable of boosting children's potentials in some certain areas. A positive relationship between the parents and this group helped them to have positive development. Like the findings of Epstein (1983), the primary students had paid more attention on the lesson; also their learning performance became better if the participation of both units was created. For homeschool group, it is vividly notable that mesosystem was such a significant structure for children's development due to the sturdy bond among members in the group such as Mr. Tim (alias) and other parents.

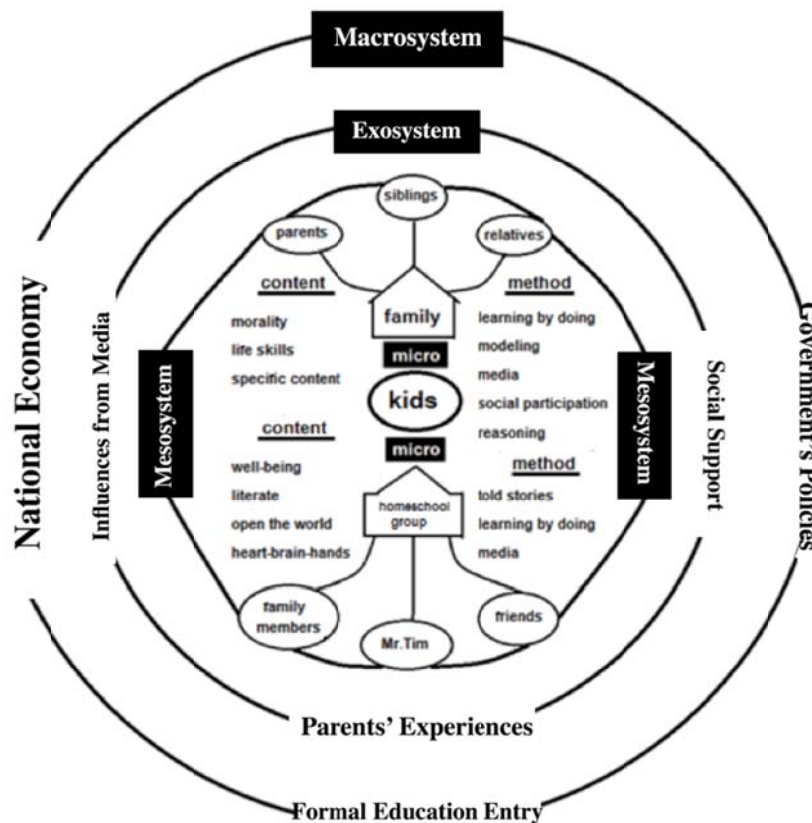


Figure 3. Relationship among the group members and the ecological system

Exosystem

This system would be used to explain the phenomena occurring in the research fields. It was not caused by whatever the key informants did but anticipatable future situations. Cochran (1990) discovered that social connections of families affected youths and teens' development. To illustrate, due to the experience of road congestion in rush hours, the homeschool group parents preferred not to spend most time on the hectic road; consequently, the parents would not be frustrated with this congestion and the children would not lose temper as well.

Macrosystem

In this system, the changes of upcoming plan might impact on the children in the group such as being back to the formal education, the change in government policies and nation's economy. To reflect the connections among units in macrosystem, financial status was a decisive issue of education alternatives (Henry, 2009).

From the perspective of the Ecological System Theory mentioned above, it is clearly seen that social participation and socialization are crucial elements for individuals to form their identities since symbolic interactionism, which expresses the significance of symbols, and level interactions in individuals' interpretation of the self, and hence identity formation (Stets and Burke, 2003). As the parents of this homeschool group were learning and sharing experiences via symbols, they were trying to interpret their self that eventually got into the identity formation process.

Limitation of the Study

The limitation of this study is the scope of key informants, which means there were some families who were also the members of this group that the research did not reference them as key informants because some of them did not usually join the provided classes but they only joined to learn some specific lessons such as drama, painting, music, and cooking outside this homeschool group. Hence, this research would be able to portray information limited to participants.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Education is a significant part of developing children. The purpose of most educational institutions is to provide students with knowledge and experiences. Parents nowadays have various alternatives when they think about what schools they should take their child to or where fits their child the most. Homeschool group is one choice for them. There were a lot of advantages of homeschool group found in this research and the socialization process of the group could be beneficial for other homeschoolers.

Based on these findings, researchers, homeschoolers, or specialists who are interested in homeschool or any other alternative education can try the teaching methods of this homeschool group. The context of the group can also help some homeschoolers to set appropriate learning environment. This case study can inspire educators who are looking for the way to develop their child's learning potential.

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