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A Study of Parental Interests and Motivation for Home Education in Russia and in the United States

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Abstract

Parental motivation behind home education is one of the largely unexplored educational issues in Russia. The purpose of this study is to explore parents' interests and motivation for home education and to identify the reasons that influence the degree of parental interest and motivation to undertake home educational services. For this research, we formulated a questionnaire that we presented to a group of parents. It became clear from their answers that some parents definitely wish to employ home educational services, some do not plan to do it, and some openly reject home education even as a possibility. One of the aims of the study was to make a comparative analysis of our results with those obtained in similar studies conducted in the USA and to identify reasons that can explain the differences in attitude towards home education in Russia and in the USA. During the interviews with parents, we managed to identify their interests and motivation for choosing the services of home tutors. The consideration of these interests and motivation may prove to be useful when organising home-education services and conducting the tutors' training.

Keywords: school choice; home education; home tutor; parental motivations; parental interests; parental values; motivation.

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Introduction

These days, the Parent–Child–Tutor triad is a major part of home education and related services. As Russian teachers more and more often face threats from parents and pupils, they increasingly start to prefer teaching at home. Simultaneously, there is increasing parental interest in home education associated with various factors. In addition, there are a growing number of schoolchildren wanting, for certain reasons, to be educated at home.

A comparative analysis of the motivation for home education in Russia and in the USA can be beneficial in order to categorise these factors. To this purpose, we conducted a survey at the Department of Preschool and Primary Education of the Institute of Psychology and Education at Kazan Federal University, in order to identify parental interests, values, and motivations for home education.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The aim of this study is to explore parental interests, values, and motivations related to home education and home-tutor services. This article is not concerned with parental motivation for *home education* of children who are unable to attend school; it rather deals with tuition conducted by home tutors at a child's house (what is referred to as *home-schooling* in North America). In order to answer the above-posed questions, we must impartially research the origins of these needs, the true parental interests, values, and motivation related to both home education and home-tutor services.

Literature review

It can be recognisable that in the era of postmodernism, when the spirit of many traditional institutions including educational ones has been distorted (Garifullin, 2018), there arises a need to preserve traditional and classical values. The issue of intellectual, emotional, and volitional degradation caused by the challenges of our time was previously formulated in our conception of the Russian psychological safety (Garifullin, 2001). Consequently, the role of school and educational issues are receiving an increasing attention never seen before. Home education is one of the ways to solve this problem (Ganicheva, 2010; Cheng, Tuchman, & Wolf, 2016).

On the one hand, according to statistics based on the numbers of related internet advertisements, the demand for home tutors in Russian families is growing steadily. On the other hand, only 0,058% of Russian children received home education in 2016 (in the USA, that percent is 3) (Liubitskaia, 2017; Bayer, 2017; Collom, 2005). Consequently, a question arises as to how significant the demand for highly qualified home tutors is in Russia. How necessary is it to prepare home tutors in pedagogical educational institutions?

Initially, we interviewed 620 parents (only one of the parents was interviewed) from Kazan (Russian Federation) to identify whether they were interested in hiring a home tutor, so their children would not attend school. We instructed the respondents beforehand to assume that tutor's services are free. Only 12% of the surveyed parents showed interest in home education connecting it with various reasons. Similar studies conducted in the United States in 2002 showed that about 41% of USA residents have a positive assessment of home education and show interest in it (Green, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007).

Why is there a relevant difference in parental interest between Russia and the USA? Is this low parental interest in home education an issue for the Russian educational system? If it is, then what should we do to raise the interest in home education within the Russian educational system and in the Russian society? These questions were also included in the questionnaire.

Methods

We employed sociological surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and conducted a correlational study involving the computation of linear correlation coefficients and rank-biserial correlation coefficients. We also offered individual psychological counselling to the participants.

Findings and Discussions

We determined that the main reason for the lack of interest of parents in home-education services offered by home tutors is an insufficiency of socialisation (94%), which, according to parents, home education may imply. The analysis showed that the lack of interest in home education among Russian parents is mainly related to the existing social

context and its norms (Bayer, 2017). In the course of an explanatory and objective discussion about the benefits of home education, we explained to the participants of the survey that home education does not exclude the necessary conditions for a sufficiently high degree of socialisation in alternative areas (in particular, sports clubs and hobby groups). As a result, a large portion of the parents changed their initial opinion (18%). Similar studies conducted in the United States have shown that the socialisation level of home-educated children is not inferior to the children attending school (Green, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

A further 11% showed interest in home education and highly estimated its value. An additional 1% of the respondents were unsure about their interest in home education.

In addition to that, we studied a group of parents (76 people) who were motivated to receive the services of home tutors and decided to employ them, and for this purpose, they had placed advertisements in the mass media and the Internet. We interviewed them over the phone (happily for us, each advertisement contained the phone number of the interested person).

Thus, we considered three groups of parents in the survey:

1. First group: parents whose children attend school (68 people). In this group, there were parents showing a cognitive interest towards the services of home tutors, but they did not regard these services as valuable yet. In this group, there were also respondents who considered the services of home tutors as valuable, but there were obstacles (lack of money among others) preventing this value to become a motivation, i. e. these parents had not undertaken any actions aimed at providing home education for their children.

2. Second group: parents not interested in services offered by home tutors. Therefore, they did not consider these services as either a value or a motivation (373 people).

3. Third group: parents motivated for home education.

We surveyed only the groups of parents that were interested in the services of home tutors and considered them as values and motivations, such as only the first (68 people) and the third groups (76 people). The second group completed only a selective express survey. It is worth to notice that the parents in the second group were not interested in home education because of various reasons such as knowledge or lack of advantages and disadvantages of home education, lack of financial resources, a positive attitude to school education, etc.

It should be noted that the respondents were asked to answer the questions under the assumption that home education services would be free or at a very low cost.

As a result of the survey, the respondents were divided into four groups:

1. Parents that are interested in home education.

2. Parents that regard home education as a value.

3. Parents that are motivated for home education.

4. Parents that are not interested in home education and do not regard it either as a value or as a motivation.

As we can see, the preferences of respondents corresponded to three levels: the level of interests, the level of values, and the level of motivations. To study these groups, we drew up a questionnaire containing 60 questions (see Appendix 1).

We started by analysing the answers given by the respondents of the first group (the respondents that show interest in home education services and regard them as a value).

The research was conducted in such a way to avoid the influence of the questionnaire on the interests of the respondents. We restrained ourselves from giving hints that could have suggested to parents a preconceived attitude towards some interests or motivations.

To begin, we analyse the survey data from parents that showed interest in home education but had not used the services of home tutors yet.

Our survey showed that, in most cases, mothers are the parent that takes the initiative to hire a tutor for home education (89%); against 11percentage of fathers. In general, we could divide the study group into two subgroups:

1. Parents that are interested in home education services. The interest may significantly increase and turn into a value after an introductory discussion about the benefits offered by home tutors and if financial support for home-education services is provided to the parents.

2. Parents that are interested in home education services for various reasons, such as dissatisfaction with the level of intellectual, emotional, and volitional development of the child; prevention of the undesirable (according to parents' views) influence of society and school, etc.

In the survey, we explored parental preferences (interest) for home education and managed to identify one of the issues of our national education system associated with incompatibilities between school education and domestic tuition (home education services). The analysis of the questionnaires and interviews showed that there is a wide range of different assessments of school education and home education. Despite the fact that the respondents had been instructed to answer the survey questions under the assumption that the state would pay for these services in the future, only 12% of respondents agreed to consider home education as an option. Additional arguments in favour of home education (assurances that a smoothly running software support system and high-level home tutors would be provided) also did not change the choice of parents who rejected home education as an alternative. However, many of these parents began to show interest in home education and, eventually, wanted it for their own children as soon as they were exposed to information from the mass media (including those from the USA) about the achievements of successful graduates who had received home education, or talked to parents with a positive opinion on home education.

It should be noted that similar studies conducted in the United States (Collom, 2005; Green, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2013) showed that the following factors can essentially affect parents' choice:

1. The social influence exerted by the state upon parents through the mass media, as well as by other means aimed at encouraging or promoting home education.
2. Subventions for parents that want to provide home education for their children.
3. A smoothly running software support system and systems of controls of home education imposed by USA educational institutions.
4. High qualification of home tutors and positive publicity given by USA mass media to home education.

We can conclude from the foregoing that the most relevant reason for the low interest in home education in Russia seems to be the low social influence upon parents, something that can be positively changed only by active support from the state.

It is therefore not surprising that almost half of the parents in the USA are interested in home education, whereas this is only 12 percent in Russia. We presume that at least a partial implementation of the above-mentioned factors relating to home education in the United States would significantly improve the interest of Russian parents.

Even if the parents seemed to recognise their interests, induced by their wish to raise the level of the pedagogical process, this does not mean that this motivation will be satisfied with education services offered by home tutors. In particular, it was evident that, sometimes, parents were not well aware of either the features of home education or the additional expenditures it is likely to cause.

The survey showed that a significant part of the respondents (41%) has interest in the services of home tutors due to the fact that school already leaves a substantial portion of the teaching burden for home, so parents are forced to help their children with homework, even though they do not have the necessary time, skills, and experience.

The survey revealed that there are parents (16%) who want to use home education for strengthening family bonds. Besides, these parents want a teaching method to help children to develop not only innate abilities but also abilities that children do not have.

The survey also showed that parents who are interested in home education have a considerable understanding of the shortcomings of school (51%). Their conclusions are drawn from their own experience during childhood (38%). These parents often referred to negative moments of their schooling that should not be repeated in their children's lives (35%).

Furthermore, the interest of some parents in home education or home tutors is due to dissatisfaction with the level of development of their older children that are presently attending school (19%).

The survey showed that it is necessary to distinguish the interests of parents whose children have already attended school from those of parents whose children have never attended school.

Our study disclosed that parental interest in home education services is quite effectively shaped by the influence of the mass media (21%). Moreover, this interest has developed in some parents under the influence of tutors involved in home education (24%).

The analysis of the survey indicated that there are many situations when parents' interest in home education was motivated by their intention to isolate their offspring from school. They arrived at this decision after considering various factors affecting their children: a feeling of aversion to school, bullying, learning difficulties (9%).

Another 5% of the respondents showed interest in home education due to other circumstances: children's poor health, disabilities, and mental retardation.

The interest of some parents was associated with the lack of financial resources affecting the state school system (12%).

Many parents (32%) stated that they would like the educational process conducted by teachers in schools to be closely controlled and supervised. The analysis suggested that these parents have a higher interest in home education.

It worth noticing that some parents' interest in home education is connected to the possibility of integrating education with family values. Those parents (74%) would like to develop their children's moral and ethical values.

The analysis of many interviews with these parents indicates that their interest in the services of home tutors is associated with their desire to implement a personal project aimed at strengthening family bonds. The analysis of these interviews also showed that these respondents' interest is associated with a protest against the social and pedagogical influence of school. These parents regard the excessive socialisation process at school as dangerous since children are disconnected too much time from their families. They expect that home tutors are capable of shaping specific religious and moral attitudes in their pupils. One of the given tasks to home tutors by these parents is to help children to eliminate the negative influence associated with school experiences.

The analysis of the questionnaire answers revealed gender differences in the formation of parental motivations for home education. Women are more often the initiators of a changeover to home education. This fact exposes the fallacy of statements claiming that men should be more interested in home education because they were angry with peers and disliked the school environment during their childhood more frequently than women did.

Other factors that arise interest in home education services are the following: frustration with school education (32%); features of children's psyche (31%); children's depression, exhaustion or illness (23%); parental responsibility for the development of their child (21%); children's special abilities and needs (22%); development of children's potentialities and inclinations (18%).

By means of a correlation study involving the calculation of linear correlation and rank-biserial correlation (c/c) coefficients, we could attest that there is a strong correlation ($c/c = 0,53$) between the resentment and discontent that parents had towards the school system in the past and their current negative assessment of the role of school. Additionally, we found that there exists a moderate correlation between parents' discontent and resentment towards school during their childhood and their own children's discontent and resentment ($c/c = 0,31$). In surveys, however, parents denied the existence of such a relationship.

In general, we could divide parental motivations for home education services into two groups: the first is connected with a negative experience and a negative evaluation of school education; the second is associated with family ideology.

We have thus identified a critical attitude of parents towards state schools. The analysis of the interviews exposes one of the reasons for this attitude, namely the incompatibility between processes taking place at school and those occurring within the family circle.

The survey also indicated that parents' interests in home education depend on the place of residence. In particular, parents living in rural areas far from the city were more interested. At the same time, other reasons were weakly related to the place of family' residence.

All the variety of interests generated from the benefits of home education can be summarised as follows:

- 1) The level of the educational process.
- 2) Moral/ethical values.
- 3) Children's well-being and safety.
- 4) Family unity, which can be disturbed by school influences upon the family life.

Studies on motivation for home education that were conducted in 2011–2012 in the United States (Collom, 2005; Green, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007; U. S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2013) indicated similar factors that we identified in our study: a hostile school environment (91%), moral/ethical education (77%), poor learning environment at school (74%), ensuring a non-traditional approach to education (44%), children's

health condition (15%). The only exception was the religious factor. In the USA, 74% of the respondents are interested in home education as a possibility to impart religious values to their children (Collom, 2005; Green, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007).

The analysis of the questionnaires showed that parents are interested in home education not for religious convictions, but due to academic and secular interests (84%). On the contrary, among the respondents who seek home tutors by means of advertisements in the mass media or have already secured the services of home tutors, parents with religious convictions are prevailing (64%) (parents motivated for home education; see below). Thus, the survey confirmed that parents who have already been using the services of home tutors were influenced by religious motivation more significantly than by academic and secular motivations. Secular and academic interests prevail among those parents who are interested in home education but are not planning to secure the services of home tutors. The analysis indicated that parents focused on religious motivations were more inclined to hire home tutors than those focused on academic motivations.

We will consider below the answers given by the second group of respondents (those that are motivated for home education), which have already tried to obtain home education services.

Turning to the analysis of the answers of respondents clearly stating motivation for home education (i. e. parents who have put advertisements on the Internet and the mass media).

The survey reported that 54% of the religious parents (mostly Muslims) are critical of some curricula and subjects of secondary school that negatively influence their children's religious outlooks. These parents consider that it is their responsibility to create suitable conditions to inculcate in their children religious values.

We can conventionally divide the group of parents that are motivated for home education into two groups: the *pedagogical group* and the *religious group*. The former can be subdivided into the *academic subgroup* (45%) and the *practical subgroup* (40%). The respondents in the academic subgroup were convinced that home education involving home tutors is more effective in generating academic knowledge than any regular state school. The practical subgroup included parents having no complaints about the academic level of regular education but having indeed a consistent desire to develop knowledge and abilities in their children (23%).

Additionally, we could identify a group of respondents whose children are affected by disabilities (12%). We call this group the *socially limited group*. These parents focus more on family unity and assume that home education can create an appropriate social environment to achieve this goal.

Finally, we identified a fourth group of respondents (3%) which became interested in home education as a consequence of their fears about the dangers of the world around them and the influence it may have on their lives. We call this group the *phobic group*.

The analysis of the questionnaires and interviews of Muslim respondents indicated that some of these parents are wishing to hire a home tutor (preferably a Muslim one) because their belief is that God wants children to be educated at home. Even without a deep analysis of such statements, it is clear that they can be attributed to religious motivations. Nonetheless, this category does not include parents who expressed their specific intentions and plans regarding ethical education. We held some counselling interviews with Muslim respondents and found that these parents' religious motivation is associated with reasons of their own experiences. Additionally, the childhood factor, which can affect parental motivation for home education, has also a decisive influence in the case of non-religious parents.

Summary

1. We surveyed 620 parents from Kazan in an attempt to identify their interests in home education. We instructed the respondents beforehand to assume that home education is a free service. During the survey, 88% of the respondents declared that they had no interest in home education. Another 11% expressed some interest in home education and regarded it as a value.

2. The answers to the questionnaire allowed identifying various parental interests and motivation for home education. These interests and motivation may eventually be taken into account when creating and organising home education services or tutors' training.

3. The whole variety of interests generated from the benefits of home education services can be summarised as follows: the level of the educational process, moral/ethical values, children's well-being and safety, family unity, religious outlooks, and parental dissatisfaction with school education during parents' own childhood.

4. Parents that are motivated for home education can be divided into various groups, which we called pedagogical, academic, religious, practical, socially limited, and phobic.

5. The main reason for the lack of parental interest in home education is an insufficiency of socialisation, which home education may imply. The survey showed that the lack of parental interest in home education is mainly associated with the existing social context and its norms.

6. In the course of an explanatory and objective discussion about the benefits of home education, we explained to the participants of the survey that home education does not exclude the a sufficiently high degree of socialisation (for instance, in sports clubs and hobby groups). As a result, a large portion of the parents changed their initial opinion.

7. By means of a correlation study involving the calculation of linear correlation and rank-biserial correlation (c/c) coefficients, we found a strong correlation ($c/c = 0,53$) between the resentment and discontent that parents had towards the school system in the past and their current negative assessment of the role of school. Additionally, we found the existence of a moderate correlation between parents' discontent and resentment towards school during their childhood and their own children's discontent and resentment ($c/c = 0,31$). At survey time, however, parents denied the existence of such a relationship.

8. The analysis of the questionnaires showed that parents are interested in home education not for religious convictions, but mainly due to academic and secular interests (84%). On the contrary, among those respondents who seek home tutors by means of advertisements in the mass media, parents with religious convictions are prevailing (64%).

9. The survey reported that 54% of the religious parents (mostly Muslims) are critical to some curricula and subjects of secondary school that negatively influence their children's religious outlooks. These parents consider that it is their responsibility to create suitable conditions to inculcate in their children religious values.

10. We conducted an analysis of the level of parental interests and motivations for home education in Russia and compared our results with those reported by similar studies conducted in the USA. We attempted at finding reasons that could explain why parental interest in home education in Russia is much lower than in the USA. We managed to show that the role of both the social environment and objective ideas about the activities and the functions of home tutors have a significant influence upon the process of formation of parental interests, values, and motivations for home education.

Conclusions

By means of a comparative analysis of the attitudes towards home education in Russia and in the USA, we showed that there is no objective and positive view of home education and its benefits within Russian society. The most significant reason for the low interest in home education in Russia is the low social influence upon parents, something that can be positively changed only by measures of active support from the state.

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Appendix 1

The Questionnaire.

1. Are your preferences (interests, values, motivations) for home education related in any way to a critical attitude of yours towards the school curriculum?
2. Are your preferences (interests, values, motivations) for home education associated with your suspicion that your child is developing a religious outlook that you regard as wrong?
3. Are these preferences related to your striving for strengthening family bonds?
4. Are these preferences motivated by your wish for a flexible and independent learning environment that is consistent with your child’s innate potentialities and desires?
5. Are these preferences motivated by your belief that home education is more effective in generating academic knowledge than any regular state school?
6. Are these preferences associated with your child’s health condition?
7. Are these preferences motivated by a desire to limit the interaction of your child with negative peer influences at school?
8. Are these preferences related to your fears about the dangers of the world and its consequences?
9. Are these preferences related to your belief that home is a better place for the development of your child than school?
10. Are these preferences related to your own negative experiences and moments you faced during your childhood?
11. Has your child ever attended school?
12. Do you want your child to receive home education, although he/she is already attending school?
13. Are these preferences related to the influence of the mass media?
14. Are these preferences influenced by home tutors involved in home education?
15. Are these preferences related to your dissatisfaction with the level of development of your older children that are presently attending an ordinary state school?
16. Are these preferences dictated by your intention to isolate your offspring from a school environment to which they have a feeling of aversion caused by bullying, or learning difficulties?
17. Are these preferences related to the lack of financial resources affecting the state school system?
18. Are these preferences associated with family reasons?
19. Are these preferences related to the level of development of your child’s character and morality?
20. Are these preferences determined by the fact that school does not really care how your child is developing?
21. Are these preferences related to problems at school and your desire to isolate your child from them?
22. Are these preferences related to the excessively large number of students at school?
23. Are these preferences determined by your expectations of an opportunity for integrating education with family values?
24. Are these preferences related to your desire to develop your child’s moral and ethical values?

25. Are these preferences associated with a probable improvement of the curriculum aimed at highlighting the significance and the value of family bonds in your child's education?
26. Are these preferences dictated by dangers from an excessive socialisation process at school or your concerns that his/her disconnection from family is too lengthy?
27. Are these preferences associated with your intention to develop a specific religious outlook in your child?
28. You are a male and it was your decision that your child must be educated home. Yes or no?
29. Are you a man who was bullied by peers and negatively affected by the school environment during childhood?
30. You are a female and it was your decision that your child must be educated at home. Yes or no?
31. Are you a woman who was bullied by peers and negatively affected by the school environment during childhood?
32. Is your choice dictated by some traits of your child?
33. Are these preferences determined by your belief that you are the only person responsible for your child's education?
34. Are these preferences related to your child's special learning abilities and needs?
35. Are these preferences influenced by your intention to develop your child's learning potentialities and inclinations?
36. Are these preferences related to incompatibilities between school regulations and rules and the requirements established within your family?
37. Are these preferences based on your belief that school learning interferes with child's rearing?
38. Are these preferences motivated by the adherence of home education to formal or conventional rules and traditions that may be lacking at school?
39. Are these preferences associated with your financial ability, which allows you to afford the services of a home tutor?
40. Are these preferences determined by the influence of general cultural values?
41. Are these preferences dictated by your child's deviant behaviour?
42. Are these preferences related to the fact that you are always busy, you think you are an irresponsible parent and decided to use home education as a means to redeem yourself?
43. Are these preferences motivated by the presence of children of average-income or poor families at school?
44. Are these preferences determined by a lack of nearby schools (school-availability issue)?
45. Are these preferences determined by the fact that your child is mistreated by teachers?
46. Are these preferences related to fears about acts of terrorism?
47. Are these preferences related to the fact that school has already shifted the entire teaching burden on to parents?
48. Is your choice determined by the state of affairs in society?
49. Is your choice related to your financial condition?
50. Is your choice dictated by your fears?
51. Is your choice determined by your child's fears?
52. Do you isolate your child only from school?
53. Do you think that children of wealthy parents are gentler and more open than children of average-income families are?
54. Do your grievances and discontent with the school where you studied affect in any way your assessment of the school where your child currently studies?
55. Do you think that some parents reject home education because of the stereotype that suggests that this service is similar to home tuition for children with an intellectual disability?
56. Do you think that, in our era of postmodernism, when the spirit of many traditional education institutions has been distorted, education and pedagogical processes must be closely controlled and supervised?
57. Are you exclusively interested in the services of home tutors?

58. Are there certain reasons, conditions or barriers that are hampering your plans of changing from school education to home education, even though the services of home tutors have become a value for you?
59. Did you eventually hire a home tutor for your child after you realised that these services had become a motivation for you?
60. Describe the reasons behind your interests and motivations for home education.