



A Study into how Covid-19 changed the public opinion of homeschooling

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Abstract – Homeschooling is a term typically used to describe the form of education where parents educate their own children at home with little to no contact with public school education. The purpose of this study is to gather information on the public opinion of homeschooling in Sarajevo Canton, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as to see how the COVID-19 pandemics affected this opinion. For this purpose, a survey was conducted and, as a result, information on the topic is gathered. The general opinion of the public leaned more towards the negative end when all the results were summarized. Homeschooling, in general, is not a term that people are familiar with and accepting of in the region of Sarajevo Canton, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has not had a positive influence on the opinion of the homeschooling.

Keywords: Homeschooling, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, public education, COVID-19, pandemics.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Homeschooling is a term typically used to describe the form of education where parents educate their own children, typically at home, with little to no contact with public school education (Hadeed, 1991). Historically, this education method, or having a private tutor come over, were the only methods of education until Martin Luther established the first public schools in 1524 and laws forcing children to attend them started appearing across Europe and the USA in the 19th and 20th century. Homeschooling has also been referred to as home-based education, home education, unschooling, home-centered learning, home instruction, deschooling, autonomous learning, and child-centered learning (Donnelly, 2012). Regardless of its various names, the decision to homeschool contains two invariable elements; a “decision by parents not to educate their child in an institutionalized setting, and the decision by parents to educate their children in a home setting” (Donnelly, 2012, p 2). Due to the rise in popularity of such educational institutions, home education became increasingly less popular over time and even illegal in some countries such as Germany, Sweden, and Switzerland. However, in recent years, many professionals (Petrie, 2001) began to consider homeschooling as a new and innovative form of education.

In the case of this study, the purpose is to determine if the general population in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the students that live there, see Homeschooling as a liable form of education, how their opinion of it compares to public education, and to review some additional information from other similar studies on the same or similar topics

Pros and cons

One of the characteristics of homeschooling that could be considered an advantage is that in this schooling method, students can put more emphasis on the subjects they are more interested in rather than suffering through subjects imposed on them by a greater system. Another thing is that there is a sense of physical, which means that families do not have to depend on a school schedule to plan their own activities with their kids at any time they want. Furthermore, there are some authors such as Shaw (2009) that claim that homeschooling gives a sense of emotional freedom because learning at home prevents some of the problems that most teenagers have to face in school. Learning at home allows students to be themselves without being targeted by classmates. Homeschooling is also a good way for parents who want to provide their own religious views or to focus on the child’s development, to do so. In this way, parents can instill certain values in their children and even let them take the path they choose. Moreover, Shaw (2009) assures that homeschooling is also a good way to have a closer family relationship since the time children would typically spend at school is now spent with family (Shaw, 2009).

Homeschooling can also allow for students to get over certain problems more easily in difficult times since they can rely on their parents more. Another benefit is that, due to the nature of homeschooling, children will be well rested because, with this system, parents and kids can create their own schedules and organize their time according to their needs.

On the other hand, homeschooling also has its disadvantages, one of which is the restraints that come with it. The parents time can be consumed by homeschooling and it requires lots of creativity, even more so when parents need to work a full-time job. Shaw (2009) explains that this method can be a problem for those families that do not have a stable income since at least one of the parents would have to leave their full-time job to work on teaching the children. Another problem is that homeschooling can limit students from practicing a sport and joining a team, like they usually do in schools. Shaw (2009) mentioned in her paper that sometimes teams from public schools would not accept homeschoolers, and because of this parents would consider creating their own teams (Shaw, 2009). What is quite possibly the biggest disadvantage to homeschooling is the level of parents, if the parents are insufficiently qualified or make poor decisions, the result would have a serious impact on the child's future.

1.1 Past, present and future

Homeschooling, as a form of education of children under the supervision of parents instead of school teachers, has grown steadily over the past several decades. In an earlier era, many children studied at home but by the beginning of the twentieth century, public schools had become commonplace and nations across the world had adopted compulsory school-attendance laws; only a few states in the USA allowed homeschooling as an exception to the attendance requirement (Lines, 2001). A few American states and countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina only require parents to educate their children, without specifying the means. As a result of the laws and restrictions, homeschoolers risked fines or jail sentences in most American states and European countries. A lucky few lived in jurisdictions that would not prosecute homeschoolers. Other families found protection in public or private schools that allowed children to enroll in "independent study" then sending them home. Most families just hoped to avoid catching attention. Gradually, in recent years, an increasing number of states in the USA have been making homeschooling legal (Lines, 2001).

1.2 COVID-19 pandemics

In the study that dealt with problematics of COVID-19 effects on homeschooling, conducted by Thorell et al. (2020), the results indicated adverse effects on parents and children across Europe, including increases in domestic conflict, parental alcohol/drug

use and poor-quality homeschooling, resulting in some children being unable to participate in homeschooling and potentially falling behind academically (Thorell et al., 2020). The majority of parents of children in need of extra educational support reported receiving little to no support during homeschooling. Additionally, parents of children with mental health conditions reported significantly more adverse effects of homeschooling, but not in overall daily life functioning. However, most effect was with younger children, with parents of a child with a mental health condition primarily reporting to be more worried, stressed and experiencing greater difficulties with child participation in homeschooling in some countries (Thorell et al., 2021). Alternatively, some parents also reported positive effects of homeschooling on both themselves and their child (Thorell et al., 2020).

With regard to organization of homeschooling, the results indicated that public schools in most countries did not adjust to online teaching during school closures over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, parents have been primarily responsible for the schooling of their own children in many European countries during school closures, which may ultimately lead to increased disparities in the educational progress. Additionally, children of low socioeconomic status may be exposed to other negative effects not investigated in the present study. Previous research has shown that, even during summer vacation, children's well-being often depends on access to healthy food, personal safety, and emotional support which public school institutions often provide for children in poor families (Sepúlveda & Thornton, 2020). Thus, preparations should be made for additional long-term negative effects connected to the COVID-19 pandemic's general impact on society as a whole. Increased gaps in students' knowledge could pose challenges for teachers regarding meeting the needs of individual children when schools eventually re-open (Thorell et al., 2020). Parents also reported increases in parental stress and domestic conflict during the COVID-19 pandemic (Thorell et al., 2020; Fegert et al., 2020) which would have definitely had an effect on the child and their education.

With regards to the potentially positive effects of homeschooling, previous research suggested that children troubled by school due to bullying or other stress inducing factor may experience homeschooling as a relief (Donnelly, 2012; Fegert et al., 2020; Cohen, 1992).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Legal issues with homeschooling plagued the Balkan region throughout history and have ultimately grown into the culture and mentality of the people living in this region (de Laat, Dadić & Kardum, 2020; Blok, Merry & Karsten, 2016). Furthermore, Ivanc (2010) mentions that the system of private or "free" education in Slovenia is, 20 years after the change to a democratic political system, still in its initial phases of development (Ivanc,

2010). Moreover, many papers exist proving that high repulsion towards homeschooling in this region mostly comes from the deep roots of established Yugoslavian mentality, rather than from the current legal legislation (Blok, Merry & Karsten, 2016; Stremfel & Lajh, 2012). However, negative regard towards homeschooling is not just region based, in some papers, by some authors, homeschooling is described as “depriving children of social development” (Grub, 1998; Lebeda, 2007; Medlin, 2013; Stevens, 2003). Moreover, females have shown to have more critical opinions towards homeschooling and their child’s development than males, possibly due to the nature of female maternal instincts (Jilin, 2018; Leskošek, 2011; Wardle, 1979). In multiple studies, males have shown to be more protective and, therefore, lean more than females towards the opinion of homeschooling being safer than public schools (Cannold, 2005) which is likely to be primarily due to the general nature and biology of males and their paternal instinct (Striepens et.al., 2012; Williams et.al., 2014).

It is also important to mention that home- and public-school parents show significantly different perspectives on personal self-efficacy, role activity beliefs, social networks, and child proximal achievement outcomes from the education methods (Davis, 2011; Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011). However, parents involvement into children's study influences their performance; where students who perceived a high level of parental involvement performed significantly better compared to those with a low level of parental involvement (Barwegen et. al., 2004). In the current day, the term “homeschooling” in modern society has become more or less normalized (Donnelly, 2012; Gaither, 2009)

Concerning studies on learning opportunities during Covid-19, which was already covered by a number of studies, it is suggested that the Covid-19 pandemic increased inequality in learning opportunities due to financially fortunate families having more success at using libraries, applications, and other necessary tools for successful learning than worse off families (Anders et.al., 2020; Jæger & Blaabæk, 2020; Pensiero, Kelly & Bokhove, 2020). Alternatively, existing studies mention that the adaptation to a homeschooling reminiscent style of education brought about by the COVID-19 pandemics happened very rapidly and that home- school was well received by pupils and parents; more creative learning was reported as well as better progress, more useful feedback and greater student independence (Bubb & Jones, 2020).

3. THE CURRENT STUDY

3.1. Research questions

The questions used in the survey for the purpose of data collection were composed of research questions which are the following:

1. How many citizens of Sarajevo Canton (BiH) were or currently are homeschooled or know someone who is?

2. What is a public opinion of Sarajevo Canton (BiH) citizens on practicality and equality of homeschooling when compared to public schools? Is there a difference in response between male and female participants?
3. What is a public opinion of Sarajevo Canton (BiH) citizens on safety and general children's development when comparing homeschooling to public schools? Is there a difference in response between male and female participants?
4. Did the entire COVID-19 pandemics situation and online education which was almost mimicking homeschooling, changed opinion of Sarajevo Canton (BiH) citizens regarding homeschooling to better and more positive opinion? Is there a difference in response between male and female participants?

5. Which type of classes is more preferred among Sarajevo Canton (BiH) citizens, online or in-person classes?
6. Do the citizens of Sarajevo Canton (BiH) think that the is the public opinion on homeschooled children is positive or no?

3.2. Participants

Participants were asked to mark their gender, age, level of education, and experience with homeschooling, followed by questions regarding their opinion on homeschooling with a 5 point Likert scale from "Highly agree" to "Highly disagree". Altogether there were 162 participants in the survey. The number of participants that took part in this study and the number of participants that took part in survey equates to 162. Out of these 162 (100%) participants, there were 100 (62%) females, 60 (37%) males and 2 (1%) that identified as other. For the sake of statistical significance those 2 (1%) that identified as other were excluded from detailed result analysis, but are included in the general analysis. Regarding the age group there were 35 (21.6%) <20 years old, 95 (58.6%) 20-25 years old, 8 (4.9%) 26-30 years old, 14 (7.4%) 30-40 years old, 9 (5.6%) 40-60 years old, and 3 (1.9%) 60< years old out of 162 (100%) participants. Furthermore, participants education level was also taken into the account, where there were 3 (1.9%) Elementary school level, 45 (27.8%) High school level, 90 (55.6%) Bachelor's degree, 13 (8%) Master's degree, and 11 (6.8%) Ph.D. degree out of 162(100%) participants meaning this sample was relatively educated.

3.3. Instrument and data collection

The search engines of Google Scholar were used as a source of information regarding homeschooling. All these databases are well-established, multi-disciplinary research platforms which have a wide variety of peer-reviewed journals, and are constantly updated. The major focus of this research was on the public opinion of homeschooling in Canton Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the effects of COVID-19 pandemics on public opinion of homeschooling. In order to obtain

necessary information on the topic, an anonymous survey was done using the Google forms tool. Survey was written in both Bosnian and English language, since the focus of the survey was Canton Sarajevo. Google forms is a tool which has an algorithm that automatically counts participants and does basic statistical analysis without additional programs. Other tools used for statistical analysis of these results are Excel filters and tools. After the sample count in the survey exceeded 150, it was found statistically sufficient, and it proceeded to result analysis and interpretation.

4. RESULTS

The responses to the question “I was homeschooled” were as follows: 3.1% “Yes, in Elementary school”; 6.8% “Yes, in High school”; 7.4% “Yes, partially”; 27.8% “Does online school count?”; 63% “No, never” (Figure 1). It is important to emphasize that participants had the option to choose multiple answers in this question, but these are percentages in total of 100% of all answers .

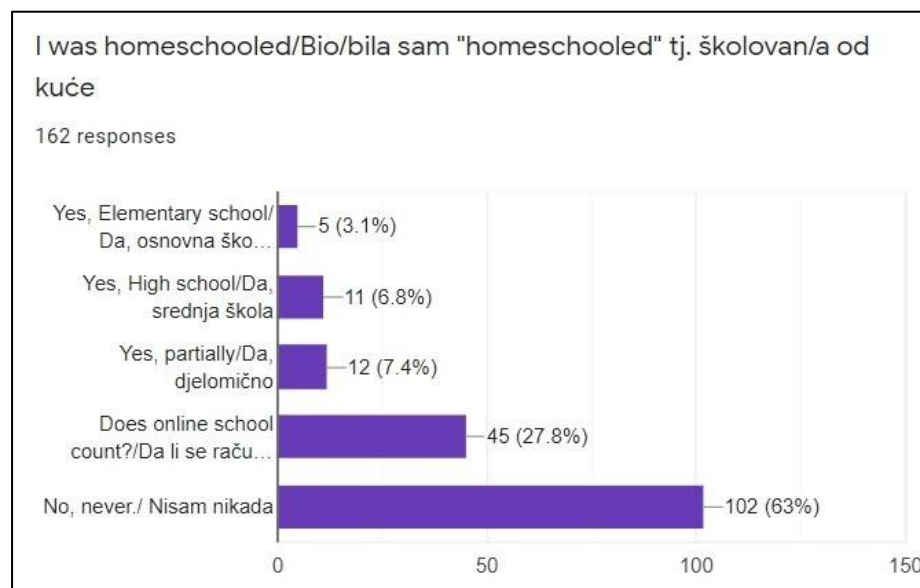


Figure 1 - Screenshot of a “I was homeschooled” question chart from Google forms answers evaluation charts.

The rest of the questions were made in a five point Likert scale, for the sake of evaluating general feelings and opinions of the participants on the given topic/question. General Strongly agree to Strongly disagree questions and answers are presented in Table 1 with corresponding percentages. These include all genders and education levels. However, in Table 2, the same question set is presented, but with discrimination between male and female participants in order to separate two mindsets for better data and conclusion evaluation.

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Table 1 - List of questions with Strongly agree to Strongly disagree answers, with presented numbers of participants and percentages per answer.

Question	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not studying currently	I have no experience with online classes
<i>I have a background in homeschool education</i>	9; 5.6%	24; 14.8%	29; 17.9%	48; 29.6%	52; 32.1%	/	/
<i>I know someone who was homeschooled</i>	19; 11.7%	45; 27.8%	11; 6.8%	23; 14.2%	64; 39.5%	/	/
<i>Homeschool is equal in quality to public schools.</i>	5; 3.1%	15; 9.3%	28; 17.3%	73; 45.1%	41; 25.3%	/	/
<i>Homeschool is more practical than public schools.</i>	5; 3.1%	36; 22.2%	33; 20.4%	56; 34.6%	32; 19.8%	/	/
<i>Homeschool is safer than public schools.</i>	27; 16.7%	50; 30.9%	41; 25.3%	29; 17.9%	15; 9.3%	/	/
<i>Homeschool is better for the child's development than public schools.</i>	4; 2.5%	8; 4.9%	19; 11.7%	63; 38.9%	68; 42%	/	/
<i>Since the start of COVID-19 pandemic, I was attending classes online.</i>	89; 54.9%	42; 25.9%	5; 3.1%	8; 4.9%	1; 0.6%	17; 10.5%	/
<i>The COVID-19 pandemic changed my mind about homeschooling for the better.</i>	5; 3.1%	34; 21%	42; 25.9%	47; 29%	34; 21%	/	/

<i>I prefer online classes to in-person classes.</i>	8; 4.9%	20; 12.3%	21; 13%	49; 30.2%	55; 34%	/	9; 5.6%
<i>I think the public opinion of homeschooled children is positive.</i>	4; 2.5%	15; 9.3%	60; 37%	70; 43.2%	13; 8%	/	/
<i>I have encountered negative reactions at the mention of homeschool.</i>	22; 13.6%	74; 45.7%	47; 29%	14; 8.6%	5; 3.1%	/	/
<i>I am used to hearing the term "homeschool".</i>	17; 10.5%	60; 37%	33; 20.4%	38; 23.5%	14; 8.6%	/	/

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Table 2 - List of questions with Strongly agree to Strongly disagree answers, separated according to gender with percentages per answer.

Question	Male (60; 37%) Female (100; 61.7%)	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagre e(%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
<i>I have a background in homeschool education</i>	<i>Male</i>	7	13	20	25	35
	<i>Female</i>	5	16	17	33	29
<i>I know someone who was homeschooled</i>	<i>Male</i>	15	23	8	17	37
	<i>Female</i>	10	31	6	13	40
<i>Homeschool is equal in quality to public schools.</i>	<i>Male</i>	3	13	20	43	20
	<i>Female</i>	3	7	15	47	28
<i>Homeschool is more practical than public schools.</i>	<i>Male</i>	5	25	18	37	15
	<i>Female</i>	2	21	22	32	23
<i>Homeschool is safer than public schools.</i>	<i>Male</i>	22	28	32	10	8
	<i>Female</i>	14	32	22	22	10
<i>Homeschool is better for the child's development than public schools.</i>	<i>Male</i>	7	8	12	35	38
	<i>Female</i>	0	3	12	41	44
<i>Since the start of COVID-19 pandemic, I was attending classes online.</i>	<i>Male</i>	47	28	2	5	0
	<i>Female</i>	59	25	4	5	1
<i>The COVID-19 pandemic changed my mind about homeschooling for the better.</i>	<i>Male</i>	3	27	30	27	13
	<i>Female</i>	3	18	24	29	26
<i>I prefer online classes to in-person classes.</i>	<i>Male</i>	7	13	8	28	35
	<i>Female</i>	4	12	15	32	33
	<i>Male</i>	3	12	43	35	7

<i>I think the public opinion of homeschooled children is positive.</i>	<i>Female</i>	2	8	33	48	9
	<i>Male</i>	10	48	28	8	5
<i>I have encountered negative reactions at the mention of homeschool.</i>	<i>Female</i>	16	43	30	9	2
	<i>Male</i>	8	47	15	20	10
<i>I am used to hearing the term "homeschool".</i>	<i>Female</i>	12	32	23	25	8

5. DISCUSSION

From the first look at Table 1 and Table 2, it is clear that public opinion on Homeschooling in region of canton Sarajevo is not very positive or open towards the topic. On the question "I was homeschooled" (Figure 1), most of the participants (63%) answered with "No. Never", while 28% chose "Does online school count?" for an answer, and only 9% said that they had some form of homeschooling during their education. Similar answers were derived from questions "I know someone who was homeschooled" and "I have a background in homeschool education" (Table 1). However, due to the Highly agree to Highly disagree nature of these questions, when observing results and percentage difference between Highly agree and Agree, and Highly disagree and disagree, a certain uncertainty can be noticed since most of the participants, both males and females would chose Agree or Disagree options over the same ones "enhanced" with "Strongly" adverb (Table 1; Table 2). This could possibly be, as described by de Laat, Dadic and Kardum (2020), due to history of legal issues with homeschooling in this region that have grown into the culture and mentality of people living in this region (Blok, Merry & Karsten, 2016; de Laat, Dadic & Kardum, 2020). Furthermore, in "Religion in Public Education", Ivanc (2010) mentions and explains the risk of interference with the right of parents to determine their children's upbringing as to freedom of conscience in the area of homeschooling being extremely low, and that in practice there is hardly any case of home-schooling that is directly or indirectly religiously motivated. In this paper, it is also mentioned that the system of private or "free" education in Slovenia is - 20 years after the change to a democratic system - still in its initial development phase (Ivanc, 2010). Moreover, Stremfel and Lajh (2012) mention that the freedom to decide between public and private school or homeschooling is included in a student's rights, which proves that high repulsion towards homeschooling in this region mostly comes from the deep roots of set up Yugoslavian mentality, rather than from current legal legislation (Matijević, 2011; Blok, Merry & Karsten, 2016; Stremfel & Lajh, 2012, p 137).

When comparing homeschooling versus public schools questions, answers were increasingly strict and straight forward with clear negative stands towards homeschooling. In both males and females participants answers to questions "Homeschool is equal in quality to public schools." and "Homeschool is more practical than public schools." were mostly Disagree, followed in order by Strongly Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and last with least

percentage being Strongly agree (Table 1; Table2). However, the questions “Homeschool is safer than public schools.” and “Homeschool is better for the child's development than public schools.” have shown significant variation and difference in opinions between male and female participants (Table 2), with males being more opened towards the thought of Homeschooling being safer and better for child’s development. Meanwhile, females have strict opinions of this not being the case regarding the child’s development, but considering that homeschooling might be safer for the children than public schools, though still followed by uncertainty through avoiding answers with the “Strongly” adverb. In their research, Ice and Hoover- Dempsey (2011) have mentioned that home- and public-school parents recorded significantly different perceptions of personal self-efficacy, role activity beliefs, social networks, and child proximal achievement outcomes. Since most of participants of this study have no homeschooling experience, this could explain participants leaning more in favor of public schools (Davis, 2011; Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2011). However, another study done by Barwegen et. al. (2004), has shown that parents involvement into children's study has an effect on their performance, where students who perceived a high level of parent involvement performed significantly better on the national ACT exam than students who perceived a low level of parental involvement. Furthermore, regarding the social aspect and general development of the child, the general opinion among participants of the survey was mostly negative towards homeschooling. Similar topics are covered by Lebeda (2007), where homeschooling is described as depriving children of social development, and many other authors (Grub, 1998; Medlin, 2013; Stevens, 2003). Moreover, females have shown to have more critical opinions towards homeschooling and their child’s development than males, because of the nature of female maternal instincts (Jilin, 2018; Leskošek, 2011; Wardle, 1979). In multiple studies, males have shown being more protective and therefore them leaning more than females towards the opinion of homeschooling being safer than public schools (Cannold, 2005); which is likely to be primarily due to the general nature and biology of males and their paternal instinct (Striepens et.al., 2012; Williams et.al., 2014).

Most of the both male and female participant have declared attending online classes since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemics, which is explained by the majority of them being university students. However, most of the participants, both male and female, have disagreed when asked “The COVID-19 pandemic changed my mind about homeschooling for the better.” question

(Table 1). The female participants were more clear with their disapproval by the fact that significantly more, to be precise, twice more females (26%) went for “strongly disagree” answers than males did (13%). Furthermore, when asked “I prefer online classes to in-person classes.” most of the participant of both genders, almost equally, answered “Strongly disagree”. This could be due to inequality in learning opportunities during Covid-19, which was previously covered by several studies, where it is suggested that Covid-19 increased inequality in learning opportunities due to better off families having more success at using libraries, applications, and other necessary tools for successful learning during the pandemic than worse off families (Anders et.al., 2020; Jæger & Blaabæk, 2020; Pensiero, Kelly & Bokhove, 2020). On the other hand, there are studies mentioning that adaptation to a homeschooling reminiscent style of education due to the COVID-19 pandemics happened very quickly and that home-school was well received by pupils and parents; there was more creative learning, better progress, more useful feedback and greater student independence (Bubb & Jones, 2020).

Participants of the survey and study were also asked questions regarding their thoughts on the public opinion of homeschooling. Answers acquired from “I think the public opinion of homeschooled children is positive.” question varied mostly from “Neutral” to “Strongly disagree” in both genders, with females leaning more towards disagreement than males (Table 2). Moreover, both of the genders almost equally agreed that they have encountered negative reactions at the mention of homeschool (Table 1). In similar studies, the public opinion on homeschooling was mainly mixed, with the general public giving a list of advantages or disadvantages (Lines, 2001; Ripperger-Suhler, 2016; Neuman & Aviram, 2003).

Finally, both genders almost equally agreed on being used to hearing the term “homeschool” (Table 1; Table 2). The term “homeschooling” in modern society is more or less normalized by now. Similar results and conclusions were also obtained by Donnelly (2012) and Gaither (2009).

6. CONCLUSION

exMillions of children are educated at home by their parents for various reasons. Research strongly indicates that home education is beneficial to children though it has its disadvantages. Countries with educational policies that accommodate this form of educational choice demonstrate a strong commitment to respecting freedom and autonomy of the family unit though it is uncommon in European countries. Studies and experience from nations that have grappled with the issues raised by this emerging choice suggest that it can be accommodated, indeed, that it should be accommodated. If we believe that freedom and autonomy are important values in education then recognizing the right of parents to choose the kind of education their children receive, including home education, is necessarily part of the expanding choice set. On the other hand, those who are unwilling to “live outside the box”, shouldn’t consider homeschooling as a method of education for their children.

Homeschooling in Bosnia and Herzegovina is not illegal but the opinion of it is so poor that it is not considered viable. Although males have a different way of thinking than females and the results were not entirely negative, homeschooling is considered to be inferior to public schooling in every aspect mentioned in the survey. This is likely to be due to the fact that the survey participants were both educated people in university with little to no knowledge of homeschool and also fit into the Yugoslavian mentality where every child is required to attend a public school without discussions or compromise.

The COVID-19 pandemics had not changed the opinions of participants much, in fact, it may have even confirmed the disapproval of the education method that a select few contemplated. The question was initially placed in the survey with the hopes of finding a few participants who may have come to see that it is possible to learn this way and that it isn’t as complicated as commuting to a public facility but it seems that the pandemics only made students yearn for the good days as they remember.

For future research into this topic, suggested improvements to this study include finding a larger participant count and a wider range of participants from different fields and background in the select region to have a less biased and more meaningful database. Next, the “other” option should be removed from the survey in the “gender” section as it adds unnecessary complications

in the statistics and the only participants who chose that option did so for the sake of trolling rather than actually identifying as a third gender. Finally, the actual knowledge and experience of homeschoolers or friends of homeschoolers could be taken into account, for example, students who were partially homeschooled and their impressions on public schooling.

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