

*Research Article*

# Homeschooling Policy and Practitioners' Criticism in Indonesia

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## Abstract

Homeschooling in Indonesia is included as informal education. Unfortunately, many people still misunderstand the essence of homeschooling. It is often mistaken for non-formal education, conducted under the name of institutions. Homeschooling in this study only focuses on parents who directly educate their children at home. This qualitative study aims to reveal how the legal umbrellas that theoretically regulate homeschooling are based on the responses of four participants as practitioners in Indonesia. Constitution No. 20 in 2003 and Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture (Permendikbud) No. 129 in 2014 are written evidence regarding the legality of homeschooling. This study found that collaborative homeschooling is the most doable choice for the participants, some community learning activities centers in certain areas tend to complicate the procedures for registration as well as equivalence examination, and the participants' dilemma whether or not the government's attention is needed for homeschooling in the future.

## Keywords

Homeschooling; informal education; Permendikbud; parents

## Introduction

The word homeschooling today is increasingly popular, its practice is also getting more demand by many parents in Indonesia. In general, this happens because of many factors before parents or the children themselves decide to do homeschooling. The growth of homeschooling is mostly driven by the parents' dissatisfaction with the education system in formal schools (Bunn, 2008). Some of the things that make the school atmosphere unpleasant are the lack of personal attention to children, the stigma where some children are labelled more intelligent while others are less intelligent and cheating occurs to get grades or degrees (McCabe, 2001). Apart from many reasons behind it, the origin of homeschooling and its development are equally important to understand to avoid misunderstandings that often happen in the name of homeschooling in the public.

## The General History and Principles Behind Homeschooling

Many people think of homeschooling as a new educational practice in the modern world. However, sources have traced homeschooling's history and proven that this practice has existed for a long time. Demmelearning (2018) found that most children in the United States studied at home because going to school was a rarity. Only people who were rich and related to the church could go to school. Ordinary people and lower classes underwent education at home or as defined nowadays as homeschooling; parents teaching their children. In the past, parents educated their children about things related to the necessities of daily life such as how to work in the field, make clothes, construct houses, raise livestock, and others. As for more academic materials such as reading, writing, and arithmetic (three Rs), parents only taught at the basic level to ensure that children were able to read, write, and count daily. This limitation happened because literacy at that time was still very exclusive. Before the discovery of the printing press, books were still very difficult to own and the price was unbelievably expensive. Again, only certain people could have access to literacy easily.

As time went by, there was a period in 1852 when the United States made homeschooling illegal due to the laws that required education to be attended to by schools (both public and private). This resulted in homeschooling not operating at all in the United States until there was a movement of homeschooling in the 1970s. One of the well-known proponents of homeschooling was John Holt. Previously, Holt spent six years teaching elementary school. From his teaching experience, Holt expressed his thoughts on the problems he witnessed in the American school system in a book entitled *How Children Fail*. In his work, Holt (1995) argued that coerced learning centers like formal schools suppress children's initiative and creativity because they are more likely to concentrate either on pursuing achievement standards between institutions or seeking attention to certain educational figures. From there, Holt's work received recognition from society, especially concerning the discussion of school reform. Holt's effort did not stop there, he wrote a letter to *Commentary* magazine's editor on August 1, 1970. Holt (2014) wrote that formal institutions see education as sculpture, shaping children according to their wishes. Meanwhile, Holt himself and people in the homeschooling movement see education as gardening, letting children grow so they find what they want to be. Several works were also published to promote homeschooling such as *Escape from Childhood* (1974), *Instead of Education: Ways to Help People Do Things Better* (1976), and *Growing Without Schooling* (1977). Holt's journey in advocating school reform through homeschooling cannot be separated from his inspiration, Ivan Illich, an Austrian philosopher with his famous work *Deschooling Society* (1970).

In general, Illich's framework (2002) in education is his inducement to eliminate public or compulsory school. This is due to the three arguments put forward by Illich: (1) the passivity, (2) the freedom, and (3) the cost. The first argument emphasized that compulsory education creates passivity for students. The initiative of those involved in education was taken away because the element of autonomy shifted to dependency: from students to teachers and from teachers to the government. In the second argument, Illich argued that the government has no right to dictate students' values or judge the worth of students' achievements. Illich mentioned that a true learning process does not essentially have to happen in the classroom. In essence, Illich believed that what occurs outside the school offers more learning to students. The last argument is related to costs where Illich thought that the large amount of expenses spent on compulsory education does not produce meaningful educational gains and equal opportunity for economic advancement because it will only be spent by rich students who study in luxurious schools.

Other figures worth mentioning are Raymond and Dorothy Moore who also became supporters and counselors for homeschooling at almost the same time as Holt in the 1970s. Better known as the 'grandparents' of homeschooling, Moore also shared the same principles as the aforementioned



homeschooling figures but their concepts are reflected in The Moore Formula. Moore et al. (1994) focus on studying times that vary depending on the child's age from a few minutes to several hours, then working to participate with house chores which are also adjusted by age, and home/community service where these activities are closely related to the interests and needs of the child. Consistency, curiosity, and patience are the main keys for the family in carrying out this formula. Another well-known principle from Moore is that the learning process with academic standards should not be started if the child is under eight years old. Modern thoughts about homeschooling from Moore garnered much praise and positive responses. Many parents continue to follow them; therefore, Moore has become one of the widely-known homeschooling methods today. To give a deeper idea about the homeschooling methods, Lippincott (2014) describes this particular topic in her work. There are ten methods that Lippincott mentioned such as traditional, classical, Charlotte Mason, Montessori, Waldorf, literature-based, self-learning, Thomas Jefferson, unit study, unschooling, and Moore.

### **Homeschooling in Indonesia: Its History, Law, and Development**

The history of schooling in Indonesia began to develop when the Dutch colonized the country. Almost the same as in the United States, schools were initially only accessible to *priyayi* (noble) families. As for ordinary people, parents could not afford to pay for school, so they directly educated their children based on their knowledge and their needs for daily life. There were several national figures who according to historical records carried out self-taught education at home (homeschooling), such as Ki Hajar Dewantara, Muhammad Sjafei, and KH. Agus Salim. After Indonesia's independence, it is very possible that homeschooling was practiced in several families in various regions. However, the historical traces are not clear because there is no valid data that can be used as a reference ("Sejarah Homeschooling di Indonesia," 2017). Dissimilar to the United States, the practice of homeschooling in Indonesia emerged not because of a thinker like John Holt. Still in the 70s, homeschooling in Indonesia began to be exposed because of the decision of a public figures who did not send their children to school. Said Kelana, a musician, none of his children attended school because they wanted to pursue music like his father ("Sejarah Homeschooling di Indonesia," 2017).

In addition, along with its development, homeschooling in Indonesia has become somewhat different from the United States. Essentially, homeschooling is an educational model carried out by a family unit in which parents become educators for their children (Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020). Like other countries, Indonesia also has laws that manage the operation of the national education system, including the legality of homeschooling. In general, Indonesia's Constitution No. 20 in 2003 regulates informal education in the sixth section. In article 27, the paragraph 1 states that "Informal education activities carried out by families and the environment in the form of independent learning activities." and the paragraph 2 states "The educational outcomes as referred to in paragraph (1) are recognized as equal to formal and non-formal education after students pass the exam following the national education standards" (*UU No.20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional - DOKUMEN NEGARA & INSTANSI.Pdf*, n.d.).

However, what makes Indonesia different from the United States is the detail of how education is implemented. According to Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture (Permendikbud) No. 129 in 2014, Indonesia recognizes three types of education: formal, non-formal, and informal. Formal education is carried out in schools. This path has a coherent and clear level of education starting from childhood education (kindergarten) and primary level (elementary school) to secondary (junior and senior high school) and to higher level (university). Meanwhile, non-formal education is generally carried out for those who feel they need education as an addition, substitute, or complement to the formal education that is followed. Courses related to school subjects like English courses or job training are part of the non-formal education (Direktori.pauddikmasjabar.kemdikbud.go.id., 2017). In this case, homeschooling falls into the informal category. Homeschooling itself is then divided into



two kinds that are both admitted as legal in Indonesia: single and collaborative (Permendikbud No 129 Tahun 2014 Tentang Sekolah Rumah.Pdf, n.d.). Single homeschooling is defined as a school scheme conducted independently at home by parents in a family without any involvement with other homeschooling. Meanwhile, collaborative homeschooling is a school scheme conducted by two or more families in deciding certain learning activities with maintaining the element of independence where every family has the right to choose what is suitable for their unit (Purwaningsih & Fauziah, 2020).

The application and development of homeschooling in Indonesia are more varied. Consequently, the public tends to feel confused about how homeschooling is defined and implemented to this day. This happens because some institutions offer a flexible learning schedule and claim it on behalf of the term homeschooling. This circumstance is somewhat contradicted by what homeschooling practitioners believe in defining and conducting homeschooling in their families. One of the main arguments is that institutions charge a certain amount of fees periodically while the homeschooling communities do not charge any bills. All costs depend on the needs of the child's learning tools and all costs vary from one family to another, with no institutions involved ("Pengantar Homeschooling," n.d.).

To emphasize, this study focuses on exploring homeschooling which is conducted by parents at home with their children without any agency intervention. The aforementioned laws and policies are closely related to the research questions in this study:

1. What kind and method of homeschooling do the participants implement with their children?
2. Reflecting on Permendikbud No. 129 of 2014, what things have the participants found differently related to the theory and the practice of homeschooling?
3. What are the parents' expectations and concerns regarding the implementation of homeschooling in Indonesia?

## Methodology

The rationale of this study is to gain parents' comments about their experiences as homeschooling practitioners on the government policies about homeschooling in Indonesia. Therefore, the qualitative methodology is the appropriate choice because it mostly includes words, opinions, thoughts, and feelings of participants instead of numbers or statistics (Creswell, 2019). Maintaining research ethics is the basic foundation that is strongly underlined because researchers own a moral responsibility to bring other people's opinions or experiences to the surface. Therefore, the consent of the participants and the agreement to anonymity were the two most important things before conducting the interviews.

In this study, there are four participants from different areas: Jakarta, Bekasi, Kebumen, and Yogyakarta. These participants have been implementing homeschooling for more than five years and all of them are male (the fathers). The interviews are semi-structured and done via Google Meet with a duration of 45-60 minutes per person as part of the data collection process. An additional recording application is also used to record the Google Meet audio and visuals for all interviews. Gay et al. (2012) emphasized the weakness of the alternatives of taking notes during the interview due to the lack of data accuracy. That is why the audio/video recording of Google Meet is the best alternative. Zoom was not chosen due to its time limitation for the non-premium users, no more than 40 minutes per meeting.

The data analysis process is done through transcribing the interviews and manual thematic analysis where themes would be emerged and be used as the findings of the study. Three themes emerged and will be elaborated on in the following section. In addition, member checking is also taken place in this study. This becomes necessary because the interviews are done using Bahasa Indonesia while the



study is written in English in order to increase trustworthiness. The participants have the right to check for anything that does not match their intended interpretation.

## Discussion

Three themes emerged from the manual thematic analysis that was carried out. They were collaborative homeschooling as the best choice, the friendly and unfriendly Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat (PKBM), and the awaited yet the worrying attention from the government.

### The Collaborative Homeschooling

*Permendikbud No. 129 in 2014 - ARTICLE 1 (No. 5 and 6)*

Single home school is a family-based education service that is carried out by parents in one family for students and does not join other families who implement other single home schools.

Collaborative homeschools are environmental-based educational services organized by parents from two or more other families by conducting one or more learning activities together and *core learning activities are still carried out in the family.*

The law in Indonesia covers the legality of two different types of homeschooling: single and collaborative (*Permendikbud No 129 Tahun 2014 Tentang Sekolah Rumah.Pdf*, n.d.). However, collaborative homeschooling is more feasible to be done for parents in Indonesia due to the lack of support from the government. This is evidenced by the statement from one of the participants:

“Running single homeschooling in Indonesia seems impossible because it is like walking in the dark, no matter how committed we are to homeschooling in our family. We still need other parents as our partners to overcome all the limitations of homeschooling to get guidance and information from more expert parents. Therefore, collaboration is the most possible option to take”.

As explained previously in the methodology section, all the participants in this study have been practicing homeschooling for more than five years with their families. Looking back to the time when they began homeschooling, they all did not have clear instructions and information from the government. Based on their personal experience, the government did not help parents who were interested in homeschooling by providing the necessary guidance and information. Parents had tried looking for any assistance either through the internet (the ministry site) or when they visited the local education office. What these parents got instead was a helping hand from other parents who had already gone through homeschooling. As for the detail of guidance and information obtained, these two things will be explained in the second finding.

Apart from the lack of government intervention, parents also see collaborative homeschooling as an opportunity to prove that homeschooled children are rich in a variety of activities and social interactions. One participant stated that:

“Collaborating with other parents not only makes the homeschooling procedure easier for me but the process is also more fun. With different backgrounds, parents are willing to share various knowledge with children such as journalism and environmental issues. From here, there are more activities and wider social interactions to do together. In addition, cross-age learning occurs because children learn both from younger and older friends”.

Despite its legality, homeschooling in Indonesia is also often doubted by the public because homeschooled children's social interactions are considered to be limited to studying alone at home.



However, many do not know how homeschooling is practiced by these parents. Collaborative homeschooling fills the void by enabling enrichment activities or assisting outreach for their children (Johnson, 2020).

The participant's statement above indicates two things: homeschooled children's activities are focused on practical learning and their social scope is not limited to peers. All parents in this study already had experience in sharing knowledge with other homeschooling families. From an early age, their children have been introduced to topics that are relevant to the real world such as making news (journalism) or understanding a zero-waste lifestyle (environment). In addition, in the process of understanding journalism and the environment, homeschooled children work together with their friends of different ages. In the practice of homeschooling, parents feel the benefits of these cross-age conversations in building the critical thinking and maturity of their children.

Last but not the least, collaborative homeschooling has an essential role for parents in deciding what homeschooling method is best for their children. In this case, parents feel that the government probably does not understand this discussion. One participant commented on this particular discussion:

“Through this collaborative homeschooling, I have come to know that each child can respond differently to one homeschooling method and another. As a parent, I have to understand what method is suitable for my child. I have heard a lot of the Charlotte Mason and Montessori methods. For my kid, the best method by far is unschooling”.

In the previous section, it was mentioned ten different methods of homeschooling according to Lippincott's book. Referring to the statement above, there are at least three popular methods that are of interest to homeschooling families. The Charlotte Mason method sees education broadly where each individual is being developed with distinguished ideas and personalities. At an early age, children learn narratives; retelling what they hear and learn. As they get older, verbal narration turns into writing activities. This method focuses on what children know and are learning, not on what they do not know. The second method is quite popular in Indonesia: The Montessori. Often referred to as 'aid to life', this method is not centered on a curriculum set but rather on observing children's learning needs according to age. There are four planes of development according to Montessori, starting from newborns to age 24 years. As for unschooling, this method gives freedom to children to determine their education. There is no specific curriculum, no definite study hours, and lessons. However, as free as the method sounds, unschooling does not mean unparenting. Parents still have a crucial role in the lives of children and each child must still be responsible for what has been agreed upon in the family rules (Lippincott, 2014).

Collaborative homeschooling is indeed based on a partnership among several parents from different families to be able to practice homeschooling more easily in Indonesia. However, the principle of parents directly educating their children without intermediary institutions or other parties is well-maintained.

### **The Community Learning Activities Centers**

*Permendikbud No. 129 in 2014 - ARTICLE 6 (No. 1)*

*Organizers of single and collaborative home schools are required to register with the district/city education office.*

In this second theme, community learning activities centers appear as the emerged obstacle faced by homeschoolers in Indonesia. Before explaining further, the term community learning activity center is well-known as Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat in Bahasa Indonesia, which will hereinafter be written as PKBM. Like schools, PKBM also consists of two types: public and private. For



homeschooling families, PKBM plays an important role because this is where homeschooling children will be registered as a form of recognition and later become their place to carry out equivalence examinations (“Ijazah & Legalitas Homeschooling,” n.d.).

Although the word PKBM is not stated explicitly in Permendikbud No. 129 in 2014, in reality, the registration process and equivalence examination are carried out at PKBM selected by homeschooling families. All participants shared their family experiences with PKBM. This is where guidance and information become what they need because, without them, parents tend to get PKBM with unfriendly services. One participant shared his story about PKBM:

“When I wanted to register my child at PKBM, I got an inconvenient service. I brought all the requirements but the PKBM staff asked for a large amount of money. If I did not pay the money, the staff would not take care of my child's needs. I knew a good PKBM with professional service after getting info from other parents”.

From this first experience, it is known that not all PKBM are friendly to the needs of homeschooling families. The staff at some PKBM asked for more money with the excuse that homeschooling registration is difficult because there are only a few families who do it. The same participant also added that parents may not give money but registration for one child could take more than a month. Here, the participant felt that unfriendly PKBM tended to complicate the situation for no reason to homeschooling families. The only way to get away from unfriendly PKBM is to seek information from other parents. This is where the collaborative homeschooling process can be very fruitful. Exchanging useful information can make things easier for homeschooling families to overcome problems that sometimes arise from PKBM.

In addition to information, guidance is also very much needed by parents in the homeschooling registration process regarding PKBM. One participant recounted his experience:

“I once tried to register my kid to the nearest PKBM and got the unfriendly one. After discussing it with other parents, I just knew that we could choose PKBM anywhere. The parents guided me on the steps I had to prepare and told me the location of the friendly PKBM. Without guidance from other parents, I would not have known this”.

Besides useful information, the guidance also takes a huge part in finding the friendly PKBM along with the rest of the process. Frequently, parents give each other tips and strategies for registration and the files needed when their children will take the equivalency examination. Files such as children's report cards and children's portfolios are often discussed and shared among homeschooling parents.

Some participants also shared experiences about unprofessional PKBM staff by labeling their homeschooled children with negative assumptions. One of the participants said:

“When my son was in his teens, we came to PKBM to prepare for his equivalency examination. Once we arrived, a staff member asked if my child was expelled from school for being naughty. I was surprised when I heard the staff's question as if homeschooling was only an option for children who were troublemakers at school”.

Another participant even emphasized this negative labeling from PKBM where homeschooled teenage boys are seen as naughty while homeschooled teenage girls are assumed as MBA (married by accident). The homeschooling practitioners in this study wonder why homeschooling is judged as a last resort and labeled negatively by society. Some of the participants in this study chose homeschooling as their first choice when their child was old enough to get an education. These parents offered and explained the concept of homeschooling and their children agreed. In other families, their children experienced formal education at first and then moved to homeschool not because of causing



problems at school, but rather because of following their older siblings' footsteps of taking homeschooling or vice versa. So far, children who have undergone homeschooling are reluctant to try or return to school in formal education.

From this finding, it can be seen that homeschooling practitioners often encounter obstacles in the registration process and preparation for the equivalence examination from some unfriendly PKBM. Although moving to a friendly PKBM is a definite solution, this still shows misalignment with Indonesian government regulations which legalize homeschooling and recognize its equal position with formal education.

### **Parents' Dilemma: "Do We Need the Government?"**

*Permendikbud No. 129 in 2014*

*Article 13*

*The local government is obliged to provide home school guidance.*

*Article 14*

*Homeschools that have been held before this ministerial regulation comes into effect are still recognized and adjusted to the provisions in this ministerial regulation.*

*Article 15*

*Further provisions on the implementation of homeschooling will be regulated in the technical instructions stipulated by the Director General.*

From the first finding of choosing collaborative homeschooling and then the second finding regarding the obstacles that parents encounter in certain PKBM, the third finding is more like reflecting the homeschooling practices that have been carried out by the participants. Would things get better if the government paid more attention to informal education in Indonesia? A participant gave his response:

"In the past, I expected any kind of help from the government. But now, I think homeschooling in Indonesia is doing fine. All homeschoolers always help and support each other with what is being carried out in their respective families. And so far, we have survived without government assistance".

For the statement above, parents currently feel that everything needed for homeschooling in Indonesia is sufficient and in good condition. The existence of experts who have been conducting homeschooling for a very long time is the role models for the participants in this study. The participants in this study also do not hesitate to welcome and guide the newcomers. They truly understand the confusion of homeschooling in the beginning. With social media today, building networks and sharing information are not difficult anymore.

However, not all participants have the same thoughts. There are certain things that other parents consider. A different perspective came from another participant who commented:

"I am not stressing out about the government's help. I am more considering data as tangible evidence. As far as I know, the government does not have valid data on homeschoolers in Indonesia yet. Even if there is, it turns out that homeschooling is still under the auspices of an institution that does require some kind of business license. I am purely a parent who educates my children at home, does the government have data about me and my other friends? I do not think so".

This second response represents the voices of homeschooling practitioners who feel like stepchildren in the Indonesian education system. They have no doubts about the homeschooling they are running



because they believe that as long as it is legal, it is not wrong. However, the existing legality compared with the different treatment, this makes them feel excluded sometimes.

The peak of the parents' dilemma is reflected in the response of the following participant:

“On one hand, the government's attention is certainly needed. Attention is a form of support that supposedly has a positive impact on homeschooling in Indonesia. However, what if homeschooling turns into a mess later if the government pays attention to it? For example, make weird rules or deviate from the principles of homeschooling? I am concerned if that happens”.

Previously, all participants' responses are a clear indication that the government itself does not specifically understand homeschooling in Indonesia. Of the two types that are legalized, it is highly doubtful that the government knows the valid data between single and collaborative homeschooling that are spread in different areas. Likewise, with variations of homeschooling methods that work well in the family, these practitioners find out on their own without any guidance from the government. If it is true that there will be attention from the government, these practitioners hope that the main principles of homeschooling will not be disturbed. The government is expected to appreciate and prioritize the autonomy and flexibility that homeschooling owns in the practice.

## Conclusion

In general, Indonesia's Constitution No. 20 in 2003 concerning the national education system recognizes informal education where learning activities are carried out independently by the family. Specifically, Permendikbud No. 129 of 2014 states clearly that homeschooling in Indonesia is legal. In addition to that, Indonesia also recognizes the existence of single and collaborative homeschooling. Two legal umbrellas have become a strong foundation for parents who are interested in homeschooling with their families in Indonesia. Unfortunately, reality says otherwise. Homeschooling practitioners do not gain the help and guidance from the government as they initially expected as shown in this small and limited study.

This study reveals that most parents undergo collaborative homeschooling because the guidance and information from the government are minimal. The method most widely used by participants in this study is unschooling where children have the freedom to determine the direction of their education. Unfriendly PKBM is an obstacle for homeschooling practitioners, not only because of poor service but also their professionalism with negative assumptions about homeschooling children. Last but not the least, the government's concern is a dilemma for practitioners. Attention can be a good thing for the future of homeschooling in Indonesia. However, it will also be a concern if the government's attention is not in line with the homeschooling principle.

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