

**Education as a rigid structure? Many parents have gone the extra mile to customize a best-fit for their child's education.**

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**H**OMESCHOOLING is not a foreign topic, rather it has been a method of education from ancient times, before schools even came into existence.

Unfortunately, the idea of homeschooling has not really been given a proper status in the Education forefront, and as a result, homeschoolers have had to depend on each other for guidance and support.

Education Faculty senior lecturer at UKM, Dr Hasnah Toran said that even today, there has not been much research done on homeschooling because it has always remained a subject that is pursued in the interest of parents themselves.

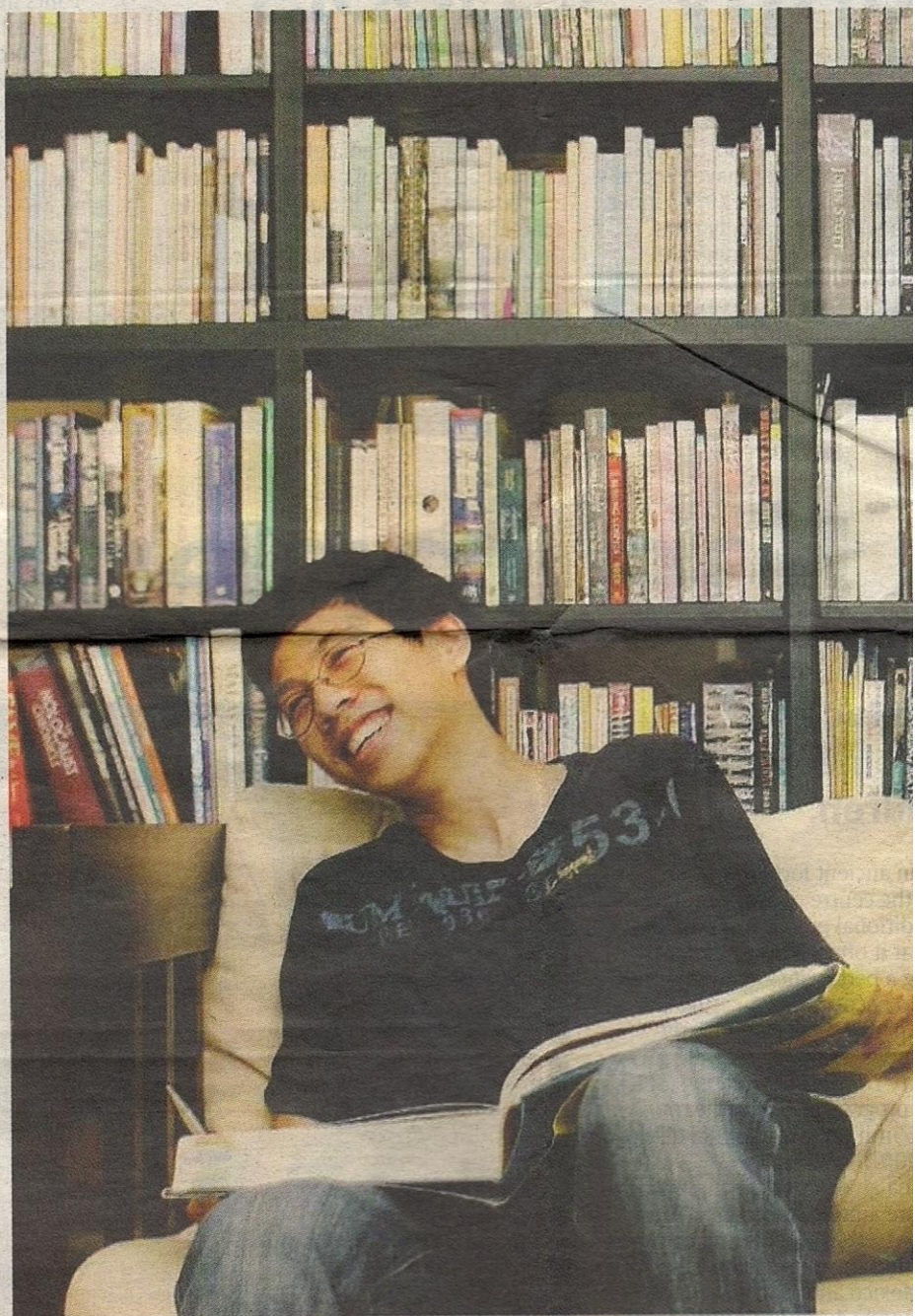
Speaking on the topic at a national level, Dr Hasnah said, "In Malaysia, parents do not have a place where they can seek professional help on homeschooling their children."

She added that in countries like the United States, there are local advisers to help with the curriculum, and schools are more open to accepting students part-time, where they go in only for the extra-curricular activities, or take one or two subjects in school.

Speaking on behalf of homeschooling parents, Dr Hasnah said that as taxpayers, parents should have the right to proper guidance if they choose to homeschool their children.

However, while she is supportive of parents who want to homeschool, Dr Hasnah acknowledges that there are disadvantages of the

# An alterna



**FUN LEARNING:** A light moment between Elliot and his father David, during a lesson.

homeschooling approach.

“It is my gentle reminder that parents need to expose their children to the Malaysian culture, and the different races in Malaysia. With modules from abroad, there are no elements of our local culture so children miss out on learning about their country and its history.”

### **Provide support**

But having homeschooled her own child due to a learning disability, she understands that there are many reasons why parents homeschool their children, therefore the government should be open to it, and provide the needed support.

“We cannot put parents in a pigeon hole any longer. Sometimes, children cannot cope with a two-dimensional rigid structure that schools apply, therefore we need to open the doors for different types of learners. In fact, at UKM, we have started a course where all future teachers have to take a class on learners diversity.”

Pioneers in the homeschooling community in Malaysia, David Tan and Sook Chin homeschooled their two sons Ethan, 19, and Elliot, 17, and have reaped the benefits of homeschooling.

Speaking from his experience, Elliot said, “When I was younger, I didn’t really see learning as learning. In fact, I played a lot not knowing that I was actually learning

from there.”

Tan said that when they first thought of homeschooling their two sons, they did research and were surprised to find that it was so common in the United States.

In Malaysia, however, homeschooling remains in the grey area, making it difficult for home-educators to come out in the open, due to fear of being forced to send their children back to mainstream schools.

“Our education system has not been keeping pace with the changes of society. Times are changing in a world where information is vastly available.

“By putting them in a classroom environment, those who have the potential to learn faster may be held back.”

Understanding that parents are not geniuses to help in every subject, Tan said that the homeschooling community practice “co-op learning,” whereby they source for someone who is passionate in a certain subject - be it a parent or teacher - to teach those who need help in that area.

A mother of four, Hafiza Abd Rahman and her husband are web designers working from home, and have children aged seven months to five years.

Although some may say it is too early to decide, Hafiza and her husband have made the decision to

homeschool all of their children.

Hafiza said, “During my childhood days, I lived with my grandparents who taught us a lot at home. Even though they did not go to school and were not very highly educated, I learned my life skills from them, and they cultivated many good values in me.”

With such an experience, Hafiza decided to take the same approach for her children.

### **Personal choice**

Coming from a mainstream government schooling education, Hafiza has no qualms about sending children to school.

However, she said that homeschooling her children is a personal choice.

“My husband and I share the idea that love starts from home, and that is also where education should begin, because it is a cultivated lifestyle, and learning is a process that a child should be able to enjoy doing with their parents.”

Ensuring a well-rounded education, she sends her children to extra-curricular classes like taekwondo, hip-hop and ballet, depending on their individual interest.

A believer in homeschooling, she has also gone the extra mile in helping other parents interested in educating their child at home.

“I run seminars and talks on how parents can teach their children at

# ative route



Learning doesn't have to be indoors. Hafiza teaching her children about plants at a park.



home, even though they are working."

She said that while full-time homeschooling is enriching to both the parents and children, it does not come without a cost.

"Because homeschooling may have higher financial demands, many parents may not be able to afford the cost of it if they quit their jobs.

To solve that problem, Hafiza suggested that parents with chil-

dren who go to mainstream schools do a 'homeschooling programme' at home, where they spend some time with each other consistently every day.

"It is important to spend some time with your child every day, even if it is only 15 minutes a day." Apart from that, Hafiza stressed the importance of designating a study area at home, to help their child understand that it is an area where they learn.

"By creating a space for them, they will learn how to respect their parent's space as well, so when parents have to bring their work home, the children will not feel abandoned as they can be asked to do their work in their area."

For Stacy Ng\* who lives in the Klang Valley, homeschooling has been a familiar topic for the past six years.

A mother of four, she says, "In my first two years of homeschooling, I

# Homeschoolers speak up

Joewin Lee had a very unusual schooling life. Having gone back and forth between mainstream schooling and homeschooling, he has experienced both 'systems' and said that he has no problems with coping, and even completed his UPSR, PMR and SPM examinations.

"The toughest part of the exams were the Malay language ones, but I still managed to get a B so it wasn't too bad."

His mother, Jennifer Lee said, "I got him a private tutor to learn Malay, and to cover the syllabus in preparation for the exams because at the PMR level, the Malay language subject was difficult due to its high standard."

Not giving up there, Joewin continued to sit for the SPM examinations, because he wanted to study law, which required him to take Malay at the SPM level.

"It was not easy. We gave him a choice and he wanted to do it so we let him go ahead."

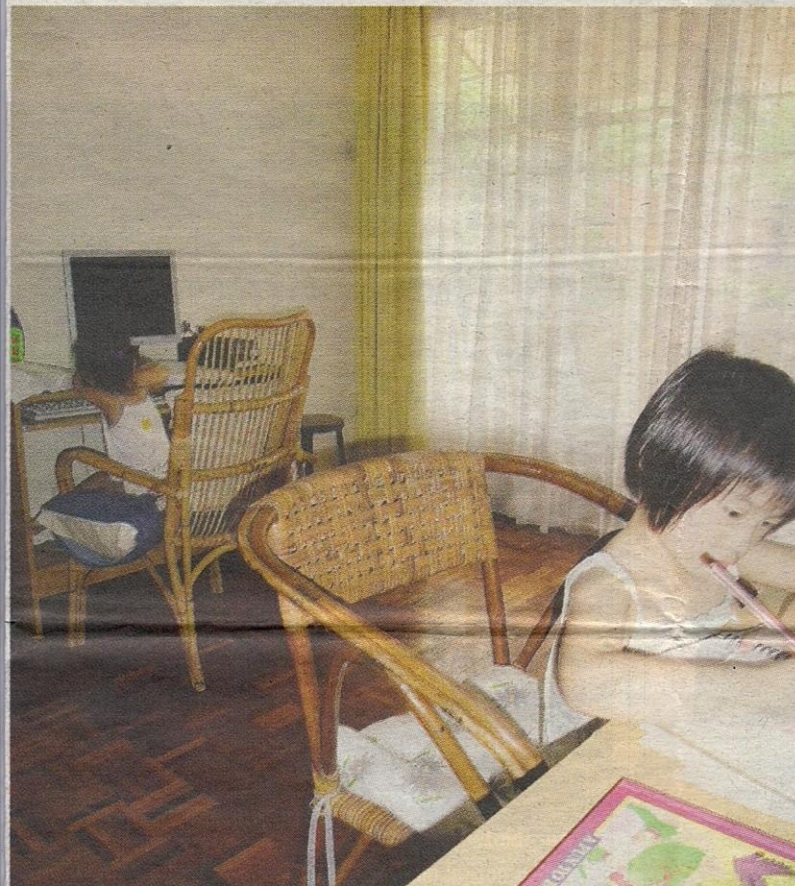
Home was school for 20-year-old Eunice Wong, who is currently pursuing her passion taking a degree in Contemporary Music in a private institution.

Having completed her piano diploma and taken time off to do volunteer work, she says, "I think that homeschooling has benefited me tremendously, as I wouldn't be where I am today if I didn't homeschool."

Given the opportunity to express their interest, Eunice says that her brother who is currently homeschooling, takes art lessons and volunteer to teach art because that is the area he is passionate in.

With so many activities going on in their lives, Eunice and her brother meet people from all walks of life and have a wide social circle.

"People who think homeschoolers do not have a wide social circle have the wrong mindset," she says.



Children who homeschool must stay focused.

## The official view

The Education (Amendment) Act 2002 states that homeschooling can only be considered under the following circumstances:

- The child must be exceptionally gifted or intellectually or physically disabled and the schools cannot meet this need;
- Family members travel abroad frequently;
- If homeschoolers are to be exempted, parents must ensure that they follow the national syllabus.

sent my children to learning centres to get them used to the self-learning system.”

Although all four of her children are now homeschooling, they have all gone through kindergarten to learn basic reading and writing skills.

### Character building

Believing that moulding a child's character is a parent's responsibility, she says, “My main purpose for homeschooling is to focus on my children's character building. It is the moral education that I can give them, which they will keep for life.”

She added that while moral is taught in school, it is taught merely as a theoretical subject when it really should be taught through day-to-day practice.

The other aspect of homeschooling which Ng believes is absent in mainstream schooling are teaching a child life skills.

Ng says, “we do everything together as a family, and my children do not get rewards for doing housework because they understand that it is part of their responsibilities.”

“At the end of the day, homeschooling is not all about books, because life is not only about books. We want to build holistic children who are well rounded with good character.”

Homeschooling may be a very

positive way of nurturing a child, but undeniably, there are downsides to it, language being one of the main concerns for many.

Since homeschooling is usually done in the English language, those who homeschool may not have a good grasp of the National language.

Ng said, “Although my children may be lacking in their Malay language proficiency, I do not see this as a big disadvantage because the English language remains as the main medium of communication, and if they know basic Malay, that should be enough for them to survive in this country.”

Saying that her family has no plans to migrate, Ng is quite inclined for her children to study locally.

“There are so many twinning courses available nowadays, and many colleges accept homeschoolers so I do not foresee any problems if their Malay language proficiency is lower than the other students.”

While it would be good to have a grasp of the language, looking at the overall advantages and disadvantages, Ng believes that the benefits of homeschooling easily trump the language issue.

### Both sides of the coin

If there was anyone who could speak from both sides of the coin, it would be parents Ian and Jane Ng, who have two children in main-



Elaine Wong (second from left) doing an impromptu performance with college friends.

stream schools, and one who homeschools.

With three children aged between 13 and 19 years, the couple started homeschooling their youngest son after they found out that he was not coping well in a mainstream school.

“The schooling system was too rigid and tedious for him, so we decided to homeschool and he is now doing very well.”

Stating that homeschooling is not fit for every child, Ian said, “The schooling method should be based on the character of a child. My older son, who is 16, is more of a team player so I don't think he would be happy to be homeschooled.”

Asked if the children have sibling rivalry or issues of jealousy due to the attention given to their youngest child, Ian said, “No, we do not have that issue because we are a very close knitted family, and as parents, we make sure our children understand why we are doing this.”

Head of Sri Garden Secondary School, Datin Christine Chiu believes that a school is still the best place to

bring up a child.

“As an educator, I think that the right to homeschooling should not be given to those who are not able to attend school for one reason or another.”

Chew firmly believes that a child can only experience a holistic and complete education if they go to school.

“They (children) need to be exposed to the world around them. Inevitably, they will be influenced by their friends and not everything is good, but this is where they will have to learn how to screen out the bad things and learn from there.” She said that parents should not be over-protective of their children because there will come a day when their child will have to be independent.

When it comes to theoretical education, she says, “there is no pressure at home and no classmates to compare with so homeschoolers may not get a good gauge on how well they are actually doing.”

● Names with \* have been changed.