Home Schooling in the Czech Republic

Authors:
1Kateřina Bočková, 2Dáša Porubčanová, 3Michl Hanák
1DTI University, Sládkovičova 533/20, 018 41 Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovakia, bockova@dti.sk
2DTI University, Sládkovičova 533/20, 018 41 Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovakia, porubcanova@dti.sk
3DTI University, Sládkovičova 533/20, 018 41 Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovakia, hanak@profedu.cz

*Corresponding Author:
*Kateřina Bočková
*DTI University, Sládkovičova 533/20, 018 41 Dubnica nad Váhom, Slovakia
E-mail: bockova@dti.sk

Abstract:
The home schooling practice is a source of many debates in both academic circles and in general public as well. For many people home schooling is an oddity that can be tolerated, but there are also people advocating the public school attendance as an only effective way of educating and socializing children who are to become future social and economic power in the country. The presented paper deals with the contemporary situation of the home schooling practice in the Czech Republic. It is primarily focused on the reasons that contribute to the decision of the parents to home educate their children in any way rather than have them to attend the public school as the majority of the children do. Its primary focus is the identification of the most frequent issues contributing to the decision to home school. It also aims to answer the question whether the home schooling practice being left unrestricted would lead to the number of home-schooled children to skyrocket or if it would remain stable. It also tries to analyse what kind of effect if any the latest legislative change had on home education practice and the opinion of the general public and its attitude towards the practice. The data interpreted was obtained through the questionnaire survey, in which thirty-eight respondents participated when the reasons for home schooling were concerned and one-hundred and forty-four volunteers participated in survey on public opinion.

Keywords: Home Schooling, Home-Education, Czech Republic.

Introduction
The home schooling practice is a source of many debates in both academic circles and in general public as well. For many people home schooling is an oddity that can be tolerated, but there are also people advocating the public school attendance as an only effective way of educating and socializing children who are to become future social and economic power in the country. On the other hand, there is a growing community of people who understand home schooling practice as an only tool providing a real-world education and skills and the only tool to fully exploit natural talents of the children while dealing with possible difficulties at the same time. Very often, the public education system is often criticized for its inability to respect the individuality of children, for its
normative nature and for its steadily dropping results.

As it is the public opinion that affects the political decisions, one must ask the questions about the real nature of the home schooling and its long term results. Because of a relatively short modern history of home schooling in the Czech Republic, we need to take a look to the countries which have already experienced the home schooling for longer time and actually mapped its results. The initial theoretical and analytical basis of our research, the results of which we present in the presented paper, became the current state and trends of home schooling in Great Britain and the United States of America, issued in Campbell-Allen et al. (2009), Freeman (2001), Krafál (2013) or Monk (2004). These countries were selected because of their relatively uninterrupted legality and support of the home schooling practice, as the countries have not experienced any form of totalitarian rule, which has always banned the home schooling practice at some point. As it may be seen, the cornerstone of this paper is the tradition and practice of the United States in home schooling. This is because the United States may be seen as a pioneering country of home schooling practices in modern era, if not in historic development, definitely in putting the theory into the practice.

The essential of the paper is concerned with the home schooling practice in the Czech Republic, namely in the reasons leading to the decision to home educate children in the family environment and the opinion of the general public and its attitude towards the practice.

Material and methods

The presented paper has a classical structuring of the scientific paper, it is divided into methodological, theoretical and analytical parts.

The theoretical part of the paper is dedicated to map the current situation of the home schooling in the Czech Republic. Even though the home schooling in the Czech Republic is a marginal player, the authors feel it will play more important role in the future as the development of the economy will progress and the new communities will arise, bringing whole new challenges on strained education system of the country. Authors of paper have their own experience with the home schooling.

The analytical part of the paper is focused on the reasons that contribute to the decision of the parents to home educate their children in any way rather than have them to attend the public school as the majority of the children do. Its primary focus is the identification of the most frequent issues contributing to the decision to home school. It also aims to answer the question whether the home schooling practice being left unrestricted would lead to the number of home-schooled children to skyrocket or if it would remain stable. It also tries to analyse what kind of effect if any the latest legislative change had on home education practice and the opinion of the general public and its attitude towards the practice.

The data interpreted was obtained through the questionnaire survey, in which thirty-eight respondents participated when the reasons for home schooling were concerned and one-hundred and forty-four volunteers participated in survey on public opinion.

Literature Review

The Home Schooling Practice in the Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic the home schooling scene is very small compared to the communities in the US and the UK. According to the data published in Statistická ročenka školství there were a little more than a thousand children in age of lower-primary pupils home educated in around five hundred families in the school-year of 2014/2015, mainly in form of so called individual education, which can be translated as less than 1% of pupils (Kašparová, 2017, p. 85). It must be however mentioned that this number does not include the home-schooled children on the upper-primary level and it is probably higher. The reason of the low number, in comparison to the US and the UK, is to be seen in legality of individual education which will be discussed below and the public opinion on home schooling which will be described in analytical part of this paper. On the other hand, we need to accept the fact that the legislation regulating the home education practice in the Czech Republic is quite benevolent compared to some countries of Western Europe (Germany, Spain, parts of Switzerland) and the swift shift from illegality of communist era to legality of late 90’s is unprecedented not only in post-communist countries.
The History of Home Schooling in the Czech Republic

In the past, however, the numbers of home educated children were far higher than in the present. In fact, home education has very long tradition in the Czech Republic and its historical predecessors. Home education of well-off and noble families was sign of prestige and a badge of wealth and importance. Even though the quality of schools present in the Czech republic was high compared to the rest of the Europe, so called „roving teachers“ were present in high numbers and were often hired to teach subjects not taught at schools, such as mathematics (Mikulčák, 2010, p. 34-35). When the schools were overtaken by Catholic Church in period following by incorporation of Czech lands into the Austrian Empire the quality of education dropped significantly and again families who were able to afford the expense hired teachers to educate their children at home. This trend continued unchallenged even after the compulsory school attendance was declared in 1774. The first official provision mentioning and legally acknowledging home education was educational act no. 62 of 1869 which granted the right for private education outside the state controlled system either in private schools or by means of home education. No further demands concerning the form or content of the education was demanded by authorities (Morkes, 2004, p. 27). However, the education outside the network of public schools allowing parents to choose the private schools was a bit older and was anchored in emperor’s decree no. 309 of 1850.

Only after 1905 new education act demanded home schooling parents to uphold the level of education of public schools with no demands on the form or proceedings in education process itself thus placing responsibility for education solely in hands of parents. Only the results of the education could be tested by the authorities. If authorities doubted the effectivity of the home education, it was its prerogative to order the testing of the educated child and when the results were not satisfactory (child’s knowledge was not matching the knowledge of the peers in public schools) authorities could terminate the home education and order the family to participate in compulsory school attendance (Moravová, 2012, p. 29 -30).

While searching the archives of the First Republic period it was apparent that home education was also acknowledged as legal during this era as there is a home education mentioned in law that dealt with the establishing and funding public schools and also with the school districts as we know them from present. This law acknowledged home educated children as excused from the obligation to visit the public schools, provided that the quality of education was not lower than provided by public schools (§23d no. 233/1935). Another education law of the period no. 72 of 1936 set a wider range of demands on home schooling families. In addition to the same quality of education that would have been received in public schools, this stature also demanded parents to educate their children in moral and to include education necessary for active citizenship in the republic (§2 no.72/1936). Authorities also reserved the right to deny the family the right to educate at home if authority found the education unsatisfactory on any of above mentioned levels. No demands on methods or any other provisions regulating the means of home education were provided.

It is unclear whether the home education was practiced during the Protectorate era, but it was formally legal. With the communist regime the home schooling practice was brought to the end. The education law of 1948 clearly stated that education to all children will be secured in the state controlled education network of public schools. Only children who suffered from heavy illnesses or were unable to participate in mandatory public school attendance because of health issue were excused from it, but these were children who were probably unable to receive any education at all (§1 and §13 no. 95/1948). Further laws enacted by communist regime shifted the responsibility for education to the state ran system of schools and later on to state organised free-time organisations.

Nowadays, Czech home schoolers are less legally protected than the US and the UK home schoolers who are protected by their constitutions to some extent. It is due to the different historical and cultural roots of Czech legal system and British and later American systems. While British and American nations enjoyed certain constitutional freedoms in
early stages of their history, Czech culture, legal and education system was formed under the absolutist regime of Austrian-Hungarian Empire focused on strong and heavily centralized government.

The Constitution of the Czech Republic does not specifically define the rights of the parents to educate their children nor does it reserve any rights to influence the education system under which their children are being educated. Only part of the Constitution dealing with the right of the parents is that of article 32 of Declaration of Human Rights which states that „to take care and to raise children is a right of parents“. There are no provision concerning education and almost all provisions of Constitution are allowed to be altered and specified by means of laws, hence in order to establish the legal protection or obligation to home educate children we need to take a closer look on laws dealing with individual education.

The Home Schooling Practice after the Velvet Revolution

After the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and restoration of democratic principles in the republic no one seemed to be concerned with the absence of home education practice until the 1997. It has to mentioned though, that the first home schooling families have popped right after the Iron Curtain went down despite the formal illegality of the home schooling practice. In the “can-do” atmosphere of 1990’s and the existence of many legal gaps and grey zones in more pressing areas, homeschooling families were tolerated and not actively obstructed in their activities maybe on the account of their relative isolation and religious motivation amongst the other reasons (Kašparová, 2017, p. 95 – 96). In 1997 „Spoločnost prátel domácí školy“ was founded and whose primary concern was not reinstallment of home education practice or dissatisfaction with the education system, but in generally shift the responsibility for upbringing and education from state back to the families and parents. Mr. Michal Semín, chairman of the group stated to its founding

„If it is the parent’s God-given duty to raise the child in order to child’s eventual acceptance of Christ, so it should be his God-given right to at least influence, if not direct the way his child will be brought up and educated. That right is for parents to claim and that is the goal of our society. “

It was on account of activities of the group that authorities allowed the experimental programme to be started in order to get data relevant to the effectivity of home schooling practice. The conclusions of the programme were to serve as a starting point for legislature needed for defining the practice. Since the beginning of school year 1998/1999 the parents of children who were supposed to start their school attendance were given the opportunity to participate in the home education experiment. The Ministry of Education of Youth and Sports have set the series of conditions under which participation was made possible. One of the conditions was the age limit of the participants. The experiment included only the primary students who were to be educated at home but they were still allowed to participate in all school events, educational or other. As far as the education itself was concerned only the results were mandatory as the home education was required to uphold the standards set by the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport which were also mandatory for all public schools. Experiment was firstly limited to one elementary school in Prague, but it was later widened and more elementary schools were included because of the high number of participants. Headmasters of elementary schools were responsible for the monitoring process of the experiment as well as for the monitoring of the participants and their testing. The form of testing was solely headmaster’s discretion. At the end of the school year participants received oral evaluation (Moravová, 2012, p. 36-37).

The piloting period ended in 2005 when ne education law was passed. Under the education law, part 3, head 1, §41 of 2005 home education, called individual education, were made equal to public school attendance for primary education. On account of wishes of parents previously home schooling their children the piloting phase was also launched for the lower secondary education in 2007 and was officially ended by the amendment to education law in 2016 officially allowing home education for lower secondary education under the conditions described below.

For all parents applying for individual education under the §41 of the education law a set of
conditions are in place. Most of the conditions are same for the primary and lower secondary education as well. For both degrees of education, the written permission is needed. Parents have to apply at the headmaster of the school of their district. The permission must state information demanded by the decree of Ministry of Education Youth and Sport. Among the information there is a need to state „serious reason“ for home education and „spatial and material background“ which can be found redundant at least.

The need for „spatial and material background“ is not enforceable at all as it is in direct controversy with the law concerned with the freedom of privacy at home. This law forbids anyone, including the government officials to enter one’s home without direct permission of the people residing at home. Provided that child or children will be educated at home there is no chance to check upon the space or equipment used without direct consent of the parent.

As far as the „serious reason“ is concerned, there are no given definitions of what serious reason is. Only regulation given by the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports is that excluding solely the decision of parents to home educate their child or children from being serious reason at all (MSMT-27466/2016, p. 2). The decision to accept or decline the application for individual education lies exclusively with the headmaster of the school receiving the application and so does the decision whether the reason for home education is serious enough or not. Even though the Ministry published guidelines for headmasters how to approach the applications these guidelines are not mandatory. The decision of the headmaster can be reviewed by the court, but it is very hard to imagine how the judges would decide such cases without existing legal precedent or any specific written demands on what the „serious reason“ should be. In the manual of Ministry of Education and Youth there are several examples of what a „serious reason“ might be, most of them to be supported by the statement of specialized establishment (PPP or SPC) or general practitioner proving medical condition or special learning need that would favour the home education. In some cases, however, no „serious reason“ need to be stated in order to be allowed the home education practice, as the authority to decide lies solely with the headmaster of the particular school.

The home schooling families are also obliged to follow the School Educational Programme, as the testing in each term is based on the expected outcomes of education, as stated in the programme. Moreover, the headmaster of the school is given right to withdraw the right for educating child at home, if there is a serious suspicion or proof that the home education process does not respect the School Education Programme. How this proof can be obtained other than completely failing the testing or having portfolio materials containing solely items outside the programme of respective school remains unspecified both by law and the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education and Youth. It also is not further specified whether the cancelling of home education status at one respective school should be taken into consideration when applying again on different school or even prevents any further attempts to get the further approval in general.

**Summary**
While studying the data from respective countries, several conclusions can be made based on the information. For the purposes of this paper, summary was sorted into two branches. First deals with the results of the public education and the second deals with the political and social issues.

**The Quality of Public Education**
Many of the parents and respected authorities on education have raised serious concerns about the quality of state controlled education. The students having below average results in mathematics, natural sciences and foreign languages have triggered the discussion about the necessity of reform of education system, which has remained largely unreformed since 1950s when the communist reform took place. However, any significant steps toward the system improvement have not been taken. There are several reasons for that, one of many is an absence of long term guidelines that would be obligatory for any minister in office. Despite the more or less minor actions taken to improve the result of the education, our results in PISA tests are declining (OECD©2015), however slowly. It can be said that the PISA results are proving the long term inability to improve the state of public education system. It has been repeatedly proven that home educated
children have better academic results in the future and gain high earning jobs when adults. Only conclusive data on academic achievements are available from the United States only, where home educated students score between twenty to thirty percent better than public schools students in standardized tests. If the state aims to provide high-quality education, but repeatedly fails to do so, should the state regulate other forms of education which has been proven to have significantly better results? If state is only able to provide the education which results are steadily worsening, would not be the supporting of other forms of education in the best interest of children, families and even the state itself?  

The Legacy of Totalitarian History  
After scrutinizing the history of education in respective countries and making parallels to the social and political changes there is an apparent pattern emerging. While the United Kingdom and the United States home schooling practice enjoys the legal protection and almost undisturbed continuity through the history, the Czech Republic and for example Germany abandoned the home schooling with the rise of nationalistic and later communist governments. Only after totalitarian regimes took over and the need to control the process of shaping the future generations in uniform thinking and behaviour had arisen, any form of education outside the public schools controlled by the state was outlawed. Same tendencies may be seen in history of Russia where tutors and governesses had a paramount role in the education until the communist revolution followed by a change of the course of the education system. The government of the Soviet Union put a great effort into rooting out the home education practice and creation of state controlled curriculum compulsory for everybody with no exceptions (Staroverova, 2011). The mandatory public school attendance can be perceived as the effort of the state to impose not only certain set of values and knowledge on people – and if taken a step further – or to prevent different set of values or knowledge not to be taken, but also to impose a certain regime or lifestyle.

There are two questions desperately needed to be answered, if the above mentioned logic is followed. Firstly, we need to tend to the position of home education, or any other form of education outside the state controlled public schools in general, in democratic state. If we perceive the education system monopolized by the state in the historic perspective as the effort of the ruling regime to install conformity and indirectly pronouncing certain ideas, beliefs and attitudes as desired, while steering away minds of future generations from the ideas politically marked as undesirable, then we also have to perceive the existence and legality of other education systems outside the control of the state as one of the signs of mature and developed democracy that encourages people to develop their morals and skills in way they see fit.

The second question we need to ask is whether we are comfortable to uphold the legacy of the totalitarian ideologies that inherently see citizen as a unit that cannot be trusted and must be controlled and continue to limit the forms of education that would be more or less outside the direct control of the state authorities and thus could possibly educate children to question the politics of the state, which is also frequently seen as a cornerstone of the democracy and truly free society. Such a conflict between the trust and distrust towards the citizens may be seen in Germany where on one hand are the authorities comfortable enough to trust their citizens in the issue of public health and allows parents to decide whether their child will or will not be vaccinated, but on the other hand do not hesitate to fine or even imprison parents who claim responsibility for their offspring’s education and educate their children at home.

The Results of the Research  
Reasons for Home Schooling  
As it is apparent from the survey of the public opinion, vast majority of respondents thinks that the home schooling practice is the domain of families whose lifestyle is considered to be alternative or somehow different from the mainstream middle-class lifestyles. As this is true in some cases, the decision not to choose the public education facilities and to educate children out of them tends to stem from the individual needs of children. As the results of the research indicate the families practicing home education in any way very rarely decide to do so from purely ideological or philosophical reasons or natural distrust towards authorities in general, but in most of the cases the motivation to home school their
offspring stems from the child-centred approach towards the education processes and child-centred ways of upbringing. It should be also mentioned that the decision to home educate the child or children in the family is definitely not a kind of heat of the moment decision, but in vast majority of home schooling families extremely detailed discussion took place before the final decision was made. It is not unusual situation that one of the parents is an advocate of the home education practice while the other parent is against it and it is often the advocates of the home schooling who have to defend and promote the practice and convince the opposition. These discussions and convincing may take several weeks, months or even years and unintentionally various issues regarding the home education practice are being solved and figured out and thus the groundwork for successful practice is being prepared. Ironically, the home schooling parents, who are often criticized by their family or peers to make a selfish decision depriving their children of school experience, tend to spend far greater amount of time seriously considering the options and the future of their children than the parents who decided to take the path of the public education. Even if the final decision is not to take up the home education practice, the parents are more likely to be more active participants in the education process of their children, helping them to tackle and overcome the obstacles they may encounter at least in the first years of the school attendance when the transition is the most problematic one.

The decision behind home schooling cannot be often attributed to predominant single reason, but it is rather an amalgamation of various issues that influenced the final decision in more or less significant way. Such a case is illustrated in the situation of the respondent number 8:

“\textit{Our son was diagnosed for the double SEN, a gifted child on one hand and dyslexia and dysgraphia on the other. First several weeks of attendance he did not show any interest in education at all and he was constantly being compared with other pupils in the class and criticized for his lacking in his written performance. But he was also very bored at school. In December it had become apparent he is headed towards resignation and our psychologist \textit{recommended home education for the first few years.}’’}

According to the questionnaire results there are major differences in reason of families whose children had some school experience prior to the home education and those who had no school experience at all. It may be declared that the reasons of families with children with previous school experience are particularly connected to the special education needs of their children, behavioural disorders or some kind of medical challenge. On the other hand, families whose children had no previous school experience are home-schooled because of the previous unpleasant school experiences of their siblings, parents or other family members or their reasons are usually connected to the objections to the education process as it is carried out in present public education system.

Following analysis of the research results will be therefore divided into two major groups according to the criteria described above and the most common reasons for each group will be stated.

**Families with previous school experience**

As was already stated before, reasons of these families are mainly concerned with the special education needs of their children, including learning disabilities, behavioural disorders, health problems and the issues connected with them. The results have been sorted out and will be described according to their incidence from the most common issue to the least common one.

**Special needs and specific learning difficulties**

The most frequent reason to home school a child is the specific learning difficulties and special education needs of the children. For the purposes of the research the specific learning disabilities were grouped together with the learning difficulties that were connected to certain disorders, such as dyslexia, dysgraphia etc. As described in ordnance no. 27/2016 Sb. dealing with the special education needs and gifted children. The special education needs or the specific learning difficulties would not be the reasons to home educate the child by itself, but it was accompanied with one or more of the issues regarding the ability of the school to respond to these needs accordingly. For more details, see below.
Behavioural disorders
The second most common reason for home education was the behavioural disorders of the children, especially attention deficit hyperactivity syndrome or autism related disorders. In many cases, the behavioural disorder is co-morbid with the specific learning disabilities or other medical issues and as it is a case with specific learning disorder, the diagnosed behavioural disorder is not the reason to home education by itself, but the issues related to handling the education process and in some cases problematic relationship with the classmates and teachers are the deciding factor.

Health issues of the child or children
Health issues and problems of the child are of the same incidence when deciding for the home education practice as are the behavioural disorders. Particular health issues influence the decision in two major ways. In the first case, children attend the public schools until they are able to cope with the learning tasks and the workload of the home preparation without being over exhausted and unnecessary stressed. This is usually the case of health issues affecting the cognitive areas of the child. In the second case, which is more general when the nature of the medical problems is concerned, the health issues of the child lead to one’s extensive absence and one of the parent had to stay at home with the child to take care and if possible to take a role of the teacher in order to not let the child fall behind in the education process and make the return to the school easier. In some cases, though, the return of the child to school is not possible at all or the return is very brief before the other leave is need and parents decide to home school the child to avoid the unnecessary stress connected to the cycles of leaving and returning to the school.

The actual process of switching from public school attendance usually takes two directions. The prevalent way with the parents is to switch to home education right away. The other way less travelled is to compromise between the home education and public school attendance in form of individual plan where the child visits the school one or two days a week and is home-schooled for the rest of it as it was case of family number 30:

“We have attended school once a week, but later on the school stopped offering us this alternative, so we switched (the school) ... Later on we realized that the (school) attendance does not fit the natural development of our child.”

This form is not very usual and ultimately ends with the fulltime home-schooled child. It is unclear whether the final decision is solely one of the families or if the school is a major player in it and it would be very interesting topic for further research.

The Gifted Children
The last notable category of home-schooled children with previous school experience is the gifted children. The most stated reason for the change to home education practice is inability of the school to fully exploit the potential of the gifted child and the boredom of the child which may lead to the gradual loss of the interest in education. In case of the gifted child, either no individual education plan was prepared, or this plan was not effective in development of the talent it was outlined for.

The school related issues in decision to home school a child
As it was explained above, in case of specific learning disorders and difficulties and behavioural disorders, it was not the sole existence of the disorder leading to the decision to cease the public school attendance and to home school one’s child. In some of the health issues, this was also the case, especially with the cognitive skills related problems.

Similarly, to the reasons stated above the issues are listed according to the occurrence from the most common issue to the least common one.

Prejudices of the teachers
The most common issue stated by the parents is the unwillingness of the teacher or teachers to acknowledge the special education needs or to act in accordance with the recommendation of the counselling facility. This was especially the case of behavioural disorders in which the progress is very difficult to attain or the nature of the disorder is prone to interpretation outside the medical classifications. Such a disorder is for example attention deficit hyperactivity disorder which is often translated by the laymen as a spoiled child with no firmly set boundaries.

Individual education plan deficiencies
The second most common school issue from the parent point of view is the deficiencies in the
individual education plan and not satisfactory results and outcomes of education according to the IVP. There are three areas in which parents found the individual plan to be deficient or ineffective.

Firstly, parents felt that even though the individual plan was arranged, it was not upheld in some or all of the areas thus the child could not benefit from it. Secondly, parents felt that the individual plan outlined was not covering all necessary areas. Third most stated reason stands out of the two previously mentioned categories. It was a previous individual education plan of family members or friends that led parents to the conclusion that the same approach would not work with their children. Sometimes it was the combination of all three stated reasons as it was the case of respondent number 36:

„At first a recommendation for an IVP was written incorrectly and the IVP made was not respected by the teachers ... they simply decided to “re-educate” a child diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder."

Repeated failures concerning education process
The third most occurring reason connected with specific learning and behavioural difficulties is repeated failure in school tasks. The Czech education system is very often criticized for not promoting the cooperative way of solving problems and tasks and promoting the competitive approach in which certain number of pupils in class are left behind on account of abler pupils who are able to work quicker. In such cases the less able students are losing motivation to work, because they feel it is unlikely to beat the abler students. If left unattended the less able students do not start to work at all. The repeated failure has deteriorating effect on not only the motivation and the overall results of the education process, but it also negatively affects the child’s self-esteem. Some of them resign on the education in general, but it is more often the case that such a child becomes a pariah and tries to get the attention in other way, which is usually disturbing and affects the relationship with peers and teacher, thus forming a vicious circle which is very difficult to step out of. The worst case scenario is usual with more sensitive children who are under tremendous amount of stress which is likely to lead to stress-related health issues.

The home education practice is often the way how to step out of the vicious circle of repeated failures and heightened stress levels and mark of the lazy and bad behaved child. Parents whose children were diagnosed with specific learning or behaviour disability or suffered from other medical issue that directly or indirectly influenced or caused the chain of failures decided to home school them in order to prevent further deepening psychological or psychosomatic issues.

In some cases, the decision to home school the child was taken as a preventive measure to avoid such complications completely. The uncertainty about the future development of the child, doubts about the effectivity of the supportive measures taken up by school and teachers and fear of the further complications regarding the failures is the usual cocktail that leads to preventive home schooling.

The problematic relationship with peers and inability to „fit in“
The fourth most frequent reason for switching to home educates the child is one’s problematic relationship with classmates and teachers due to their specific learning and/or behavioural disorders. Sometimes it is because of not well handled situation by the head teacher or the teachers present who are not able to make the child active and valued part of the children’s group. Some parents stated that even though teacher tried to make the child part of the group it was in vain. Either the effort started too late and the child was already being ostracized due to their behaviour or simply because they were „different“ or parents felt that teacher is hiding disdain for their child and it is being transferred to children in the classroom. Whatever the reason, being the last one to be chosen for games, being the subject for pranks and having nobody to hang out with in the afternoon led the families to start home schooling their children.

Severe health issues complicating or preventing the school attendance
In few of the cases, the medical issues were serious enough to directly affect the ability of the child to attend the school regularly. The most usual case is that children in this category are of limited mobility and require the school premises to be barrier-free which tends to be a high-cost challenge for the
school management. Some of the cases are connected to the fear of possible ostracism of the child, because of one’s condition. The most serious case was provided by respondent number 37:

“...she’s on wheelchair and was accepted by local school, but the principal didn’t want her there ... not even for the Music or the Art (classes). They wanted us to teach her at home and even demanded to check upon us once a week and give us homework ... so we took her out for home schooling entirely.”

Other reasons
The list of least stated reasons follows. Only two or one of the respondents claimed them to be a factor when deciding to home school their children.

Premature breaking of the family bonds
Two of the respondents felt that the beginning of the school attendance had a deteriorating impact on the relationships within the family and the child was taken out of the family environment prematurely thus putting the child into stressful situation that the parents felt was not necessary. As the respondent number 23 commented:

“... the family is dismantled and each and every member is put to a cage according to the age ...”

Negative school experience
In two cases the negative school experience of one or both the parents, siblings, relative or a friend was a significant factor when deciding to home school. It was either the negative experience with particular school of a catch-area a child belonged into or a negative experience with public schools in general that was serious or traumatic enough for parents not to risk the possibility of similar experience happening to their child or children. As respondent number 32 admitted:

“...on top of that, I was personally bullied in second year ... by the teacher and it definitely marked my decision to home school.”

Fear of social pathologies
In two of the cases families was worried about the high possibility of encountering the bullying, cyber-bullying or any other form of social-pathologies that are common among the children in public schools. Apart from relatively high chance – about one of four children are bullied at least once while attending elementary school (Pospišil, 2006, p. 3) – the children in question were diagnosed with specific learning difficulties and behavioural disorders, making them one of the typical victim archetypes.

Lifestyle different from the mainstream
In one of the cases it was the different lifestyle of the family that contributed greatly to decision to home school.

Families without previous school experience
The reasons contributing to the decision to home school the children with the families in which children has no experience with public education system are in contrast to the families described above connected to the public school system deficiencies in general and the lifestyle of the families, including their political and philosophical beliefs.

Negative school experience and distrust in the public school system
The predominant reason with the families whose children do not have any previous public school experience is the negative experience of their parents, relatives or friends, which are so serious, parents did not risk their children to be put into the similar position as they were.

Another significant factor belonging to this category is a general distrust towards the state regulated education system which is proven to have many shortcomings and deficiencies and it has more of them from the point of view of the parents and families who decided to home school. Amongst the most pronounced arguments against the education system are for example criticism of the curricula documents for being out of the touch with the real life, inability of Czech school to respect the individual pace, learning abilities and talents of the children, prevalence of the frontal teaching methods, heavily overcrowded classes of very mixed abilities and overall intransparency of the system in terms of sometimes enormous differences between the qualifications and attitude of the teachers within the one school and even on the level of one year – the placing children into school were compared to drawing a lottery in a sense that one employee of the state could promote the well-being of the children and effectively preparing them for the future life, while the other employee could cause the trauma or damage that may be beyond remedies and this is the
kind of lottery parents are unwilling to play. As the respondent number 32 stated:

“The system is not created to respect the individuality of the child – everything depends on the teacher and the continuous quality of education simply cannot be guaranteed ... well, in our town there are thirty children in a class, even more sometimes, when the exception is approved ... that’s scary. Moreover, I disdain the grade system and the normative assessment...”

Another significant issue parents often stated in the questionnaire as a note to the question was the artificial nature of the school environment and the artificial nature of the education process itself. Parents feel that the home schooling is a more natural education process than the public school attendance (or any other school attendance in general) in the sense of the relationship parent-child relationship continuously transforms into the teacher-pupil relationship more smoothly adding a new level to an existing relationship instead of the creation of a brand new relationship that may be confusing in the result.

**Premature breaking of the family bonds**
The breaking of the family bonds or the change in the relationship dynamics within the family is more concerned issue with the families whose children do not have previous school experience than with those families whose children do. Some of the families are simply not ready to part for the time being and some families are very close that the public school attendance has never been even considered.

Relationships related issue that was spelled out several times was the deficiency the parents saw in the school environment inability to promote or create sufficient opportunities for children to create healthy and deeper peer to peer relationships by providing children the time and stimuli to do so.

**The problematic relationship with peers and inability to „fit in“ and fear of the social pathologies**
The third most stated concern of the families whose children had no school experience is the possible difficulties of their children to fit amongst their peers. The core of these concerns, however, is different than that of the families whose children had some previous school experience. As it was stated before, the main concern was the possibility of ostracising or bullying the children because of their specific educational needs, behavioural differences or visible health issues. With the families with no previous school experience the concerns stem from the differences in lifestyle of the family in question and the mainstream culture. Parents feel that the lifestyle of the family is different enough to be the reason by itself to ridicule and bully their children and therefore they decided to home school them, rather to risk possible psychological damage.

**Health issues and severe health issues complicating or preventing the school attendance**
Similarly, to the families with the school experience the health issues were considered when deciding for home schooling with the families with no school experience, even though this particular reason occurred in half of the cases compared with the occurrence with school-experience families. The severe health issues on the other hand led to the home schooling right away in more cases. As with the school-experience families, the mobility of the children was the prevalent case.

**Other reasons**
This paragraph states the reasons that were not the primary focus of the questionnaire. These reasons are listed according to the number of occurrences without a regard to the previous school experience or the absence of school experience.

**Travelling families**
Two of the families stated their reason to be frequent travelling. One family was staying abroad at the time of data collection and one family was traveling on regular basis just for the sake of getting the first hand cultural experience and getting familiar with foreign countries.

**Opinion of the General Public on Home Education**
The purpose of the questionnaire was to map the opinion of the general public on home education practice. For the purpose of this research people who have no experience with the practice were chosen. The focus was placed mainly on the opinion on the quality of the education and the opportunity of the home educated children to socialize with their peers.
Opinion on Quality of Education
Regarding the quality of the education, the majority of the respondents – 61.1% of them – thinks that the overall quality of education is better or same with the home education than the education received in schools in general. Approximately a quarter of the respondents (23.6%) believes the quality of education to be of the same level as in the schools. Almost a third of the respondents (31.9%) stated the home schooling practice to provide education significantly better than education received at schools.

On the other hand, a quarter of the respondents (34%) expressed doubts on home education quality and stated that it is worse than education at schools and 4.9% of the respondents thinks the quality of the home education is significantly lower than quality of education at schools.

The Access to Specialists
The questionnaire was also concerned with the opinion on the access of the home-schooled children to the range of specialists, such as the career counsellor, logopedist, psychologist etc. compared to the opportunity of children at school who can visit such an expert on the school premises.

More than a quarter of the respondents (36.8%) are convinced that the home schooling practice does not influence the opportunity to exploit the service of the specialists and stated that they have an equal chance to reach the specialist if needed. Some of the respondents (17.4%) even believe that home-schooled children have the greater opportunity to reach the specialist than the children attending the schools.

On the other hand, almost the same number of the respondents (34.7%) expressed the opposite opinion – they think that home-schooled children are disadvantaged to the children at schools when it comes to the access to the services of specialists. In addition, more than every tenth respondent (11.1%) believes that home schooled children are severely limited in their options and their access to the services of specialists is almost non-existent.

Material Background
The material background is to be understood as the equipment used to educate the children. In contrast to the learning material, the material background items are considered to be the „big guns“ mostly in terms of the price. Among the material background items, the audio-visual technology, easels and computers are counted.

When asked about the opinion on the material background of the home-schooled children, almost the half of the respondents (48.6%) thinks that it is worse than the material background enjoyed by the children at school. Almost a third (29.9%) stated that the material background is the same and 21.5% of respondents think that the material background of the home-schooled children is actually better than that of children attending schools.

The Quality of Learning Materials
Another part contributing to the quality of the education is connected to the quality of the learning materials children are able to work with. When asked about the quality of learning materials almost the half of the respondents (42.4%) concludes that the home-schooled children have learning materials of the same quality as the children at schools do. Almost a third of the respondents (29.9%) expressed their belief that the quality of the learning materials is worse than materials provided by schools and more than a quarter of the respondents (27.8%) stated that the learning materials of the home-schooled children exceeds the quality of learning materials that are available for children at schools.

The Participation on the Cultural and Educational Events
Another issue in question was the opportunity to participate on the cultural and educational events focused on the school-aged children. Almost a quarter of the respondents (21.5%) are convinced that there is no difference between schooled and home-schooled children regarding the opportunity to attend such events. Another quarter of the respondents (25.7%) stated that the opportunity of the home-schooled children is greater, because the classic methods of education as are known from schools are limited because of the difficult time management so the education is taken outside to the „pre-made“ educational events. There is also a group of respondents (16.7%) who thinks that the opportunity of the home-schooled children to attend such event is greater because it is in nature of home schooling practice to take place more outside the
home and the cultural and educational events are attended on purpose and 2.1% of respondents simply thinks the opportunity is greater without stating any reason why.

A quarter of the respondents (24.3%) was on the other hand convinced that the home-schooled children have the less opportunity to attend such an event, because they feel that the parents are not able to choose effectively from the high number of the events, so their educational impact is diminished. Another 5.6% of the respondents declared that the opportunity is lower because of the time management issues and 4.2% thinks that the opportunity is lower because attending such events puts a strain on the family budget. There is, however, one issue that has to be taken into the consideration when dealing with the presence of the home-schooled children at the events that are held by the school or at school premises – many of the home-schooled children are registered at schools that are willing to accept them which may be the schools many kilometres away from their home as it is case of one respondent who describes situation as follows:

“We do not participate, because the school that signed us in is more than fifty kilometres away, so because of time and money, we visit school twice a year when assessment takes place…”

Time Required to Learn Knowledge or Skill
Almost the half of the respondents (48.6%) stated that the amount of time required to master a certain set of skills or to get a knowledge of a certain area is lower compared to amount of time required by children in school when mastering same set of skill or knowledge and 27.8% thinks that the amount of time required is approximately the same. In contrast to such beliefs a quarter of the respondents (23.6%) thinks that the amount of time the home-schooled children require to learn a set of skill or knowledge is higher than with the school-attending children.

The Competence of Parents as Teachers
When it comes to the question of the competence of parents to teach their children in effective way, more than the half of the respondents (52.8%) states that parents cannot be as effective in education (if they are not teachers by the profession) because they are lacking in are of methodology, psychology etc. A quarter of the respondents (25.7%) thinks that the parent can be as competent as a teacher who successfully completed the teacher training programme and almost a quarter (21.5%) stated that the parent could be even more competent to educate one’s child because of the in-depth knowledge of own child preferences, strengths and weaknesses.

Socialization and Relationship with Peers
Probably the most burning issue with the opponents of the home schooling practice is the inadequate socialization of the home schooling children. It has been repeatedly proven that the home-schooled children have the same (or better) quality relationship with peers and adults, yet the predominant image of the home-schooled child is the one of child sitting alone in the kitchen surrounded by books and, hidden in the shadows, observing happy children on the playground in the free time, unable to make a contact. Such a prejudice is in direct contrast to several studies, for example the study made by National Institute of Child’s Health and Human Development which results were made public in 2006. In contrast to general opinion, the results made connection between the time spent in the child care facilities, such as pre-schools and daycare centres to the higher occurrence of behavioural problems and inability to get along well with peers.

The Opportunity to Spend Time among the Peers
Only approximately every tenth person (11.8%) believes that the home-schooled children has the equal chance to spend time amongst their peers as the children in the school environment do and only 3.5% of the respondents stated that they think the home-schooled children have actually greater opportunities to spend time with their peers.

The predominant belief among the general public (66% of the respondents) is that home-schooled children have limited opportunity to socialize with the other children of their own age and almost every fifth person participating (18.8%) expressed the opinion that home-schooled children have almost no chance to interact with their peers at all.

The Quality of Relationships
Similarly, to the issue of the opportunity to meet their peers the prevalent opinion on the quality of the relationships with peers which the home-schooled children happen to have is sceptical at the best. Almost half of the respondents (46.5%) view the relationship of home-schooled children with their peers to be of less quality and depth as their public
schooled counterparts and 22.9% sees the quality and depth of their relationships significantly lower. Only a third of the respondents believe that the relationship of home-schooled children with their peers is actually of the same or better quality. The same quality was the case with 23.6% of respondents and 7% of respondents thinks that the relationship of the home-schooled children is of higher or much higher quality.

**Opportunity to Engage in the Clubs or Afterschool Activities**
Because of its connection to the social life, one of the questions was concerned with the engagement of home-schooled children in afterschool activities or clubs. A half of the respondents (53.5%) think that the chance to be a member of such group is same for home-schooled children and public schooled children. More than a third of participants (38.2%) were of an opinion that the home-schooled children have less chance to actively participate in clubs and afternoon activities and 8.3% of respondents think that home-schooled children have better access to the clubs and its activities.

**The Progression to Adulthood and Professional Life**
Following question aimed to determine the public opinion tends to see the transition to adulthood to be more problematic with home-schooled children in comparison to children from school. In this area the public is divided approximately to thirds. A little more than a third of the participants (38.9%) are convinced that the transition from adolescence to adulthood in the sense of transition from the student to the economically active person is equally difficult for home-schooled children and children who attended a school. Another third of respondents (31.9%) believes that the transition described above is more difficult for home-schooled children than it is for school children. The last of the thirds is more fragmented and contains people who believe that the transition is very problematic for home-schooled children (13.9%), people who claim that the transition is in fact easier for home-schooled children (11.1%) and people who even think that the transition far less problematic (4.2%).

**General Opinions on Home Schooling**
This part of questionnaire was concerned with the perception of the home schooling practice in general and their practitioners.

**The Results of Home Schooling**
In terms of academic achievement, more than half of the respondents (56.3%) believe that the home schooling practice leads to equal or even better academic results than results of the schooled children.

**The Home Schooling Family**
More than three quarters of the respondents (77.1%) believe that the home schooling practice is predominantly spread among the families with so-called alternative lifestyle and so the decision to home school a child is made on basis of religious, political and philosophical beliefs that are too far away from the mainstream.

**The Tradition of Home Schooling Practice in the Czech Republic**
Again almost three quarters of the participants (71.5%) are convinced that the home schooling practice is fairly new phenomenon and has no tradition in Czech history whatsoever, contrary to the historical proofs stated in the chapter on Czech home schooling history in the theoretical part of this paper.

**Conclusions**
There were several notable outcomes of the survey in both main topics. Following conclusions are drawing upon the questionnaire results and it aims to bring the isolated findings into the bigger picture.

**The Quality of Education**
A surprisingly large number of respondents see the academic results of the home schooling practice as equal to or even better than the results of the children attending the public school. We may interpret such a result in two possible ways, but probably as a combination of both.

The first interpretation would presume the growing awareness of the effectivity of the home schooling practice which was proven to be higher than the effectivity of the public school regardless the education or academic achievement of educating parents (Ray, 2016, p. 2).

The second interpretation is based in the growing distrust of the public in the Czech education system
to be the effective tool in preparing the new generation for the challenges of adulthood, mainly in the terms of possessing the marketable skills and the know-how of the respective profession they were training for.

The Image of a Home Schooling Family
It has become apparent that the image of a home schooling family in the general public is more likely to be shaped by the mass media brought reports of the closed community of The Twelve Tribes or the documentary cycle of “Navždy spolu”. However, the aim of each and every media is primarily good ratings, so it is unlikely they would bring an image of the average home schooling family. As it may be seen from the survey results, prevailing image of an average home schooling family is one that pulled their child from school because of serious concerns about child’s well-being, based on the learning, behavioural or medical difficulties that would or have already put the child in difficult position. Such position had a potential to endanger the child’s social development or child’s interest in education or the child’s self-esteem and sense of own value as a human being.

“Children of the Wolves”
 Probably the most persistent prejudice toward the home education practice is the belief about the isolated child sitting all day with the mother in the kitchen and studying while the mother is preparing the meal for the happier part of a family coming back from work and school. 

Contrary to this belief, home educating families team themselves up in support groups according to their geographical location and coordinate their efforts. It is not unusual for home schooling to take up a form of a small class of children of different ages, skills and preferences and thus it is imperative to learn the cooperative form of group-work as soon as possible in order to maximize the education potential of the group. In this way, children are able to form strong relationships where all members of a group are valued for their assets. One may argue, that they have no other option, but on the other, one of the most stated arguments advocating the public school attendance is that the children will not only face the issues they like.

From the social dynamics point of view, almost all literature dealing with the school-class climate or social dynamics tell us that the forming of smaller groups within the boundaries of single school-class according to the sympathies and shared views and interests is perfectly natural. The only difference is, that rarely anybody is able to work with such a group to maximize the potential hidden within such an interest group at public schools which is in direct contrast to small groups of home-schooled children.

Drawing on the professional experience of the authors of the paper, the publicly shared idea of bonding of the most children within one school-class is a wishful thinking at the best and severe underestimating of the possible danger of forced socialization at the worst.

References


