

# Unschooling vs. Classic Methods and Forms of Homeschooling from the Perspective of the Parents of Homeschooled Children

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**Abstract.** The research is concerned with the possibilities of unschooling in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland. It applies both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Using an open-ended questionnaire, it maps the opinions of 78 parents from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland on the influence of the preferred methods and forms of homeschooling (unschooling, classical methods and forms) on the course and problems of the compulsory testing of a child in an umbrella school. Based on the research findings, it can be stated that the parents of homeschooled children perceive unschooling mainly as self-arranged education, the support of the child's interests, and also complement it with other methods and forms of education. The problems during compulsory testing in an umbrella school, which were presented by the respondents, consisted firstly of subjectively negative evaluations of the course of the testing, statements concerning the respondents' fear and descriptions of specific situations or the behaviour of the examiner. The research has also shown that the choice of the methods and forms of homeschooling does not affect whether the parents and children face more problems during the compulsory testing.

**Keywords:** *homeschooling, unschooling, methods and forms of homeschooling, problems during the compulsory testing, classical methods and forms of homeschooling.*

## Savaiminio mokymosi ir klasikiniai metodai bei formos tėvų, mokinčių vaikus namuose, vertinimu

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** *mokymasis namuose, savaiminis ugdymas, mokymosi namuose metodai ir formos, problemos, kurių kyla atliekant privalomąjį žinių patikrinimą, mokymosi namuose klasikiniai metodai ir formos.*

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## Introduction

Unschooling can be considered as a form of homeschooling. It differs from other forms of homeschooling in that it has no curriculum. According to Gray & Riley (2013), the parents of children who practice unschooling do not put their children into schools, do not give the children any schoolwork within the homeschooling, do not use the specified textbooks and do not test them to measure learning progress. Their children can learn whatever they need to know and pursue their interests, and their parents support them in doing so.

Unschooling is not only a philosophy of education, but also a lifestyle for many families. Learning is perceived here as a lifelong process in which the entire surrounding world fulfils the function of a classroom (Ricci, 2012). It is important that the children have a suitable environment for self-education, in which they can communicate freely across different age groups and freely learn the main instruments of culture (Gray, 2013).

Holt (1964, 1967, 2003) used the term unschooling in the 1970s. Many families of the so-called “unschoolers” (families practicing unschooling within their children’s homeschooling) claimed to have opted for unschooling precisely after reading his work or the magazine *Growing without Schooling*, which was published by Holt up until 1985 and still published after his death until 2001 (Gray & Riley, 2013). In the current time, the *Life Learning Magazine* is being published.<sup>1</sup>

In many countries, unschooling is a legitimate alternative to school education, e.g. in England or the United States of America. There is no official register of children learning through unschooling. Gray & Riley (2013) attempted a rough estimate in the United States, claiming that it is about 10% of homeschooled children, which would make up about 0.34% of all school-aged children. Furthermore, they found in a sample of 232 families practicing unschooling that 83% of children from these families continued their studies at universities and had no problem continuing their studies with the traditional school system. In addition, the vast majority of these children appreciated the possibilities of unschooling later in adulthood, especially the freedom to pursue their own interests, acquired self-motivation, self-management, personal responsibility, mental and social well-being, positive attitudes towards learning and good family relationships (Gray & Riley, 2013, 2015).

On the other hand, there are countries where unschooling is not a legitimate alternative to education. This also includes Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland. In Slovakia, the homeschooling of children at the first stage of primary school (ISCED 1) has been permitted since 2008. This form of compulsory school attendance<sup>2</sup> is called *individual education*. In the Czech Republic, where the term *individual education* is also used, students at the first stage of primary school (ISCED 1), since 2005, and at the second stage of primary school (ISCED 2), since 2016, can be educated in this way. The law in these countries specifies the implementation of individual education according to the school educational program of the school to which the student was admitted, the so-called umbrella school. This program is binding for the student, as well as for the person educating him. A student in an umbrella school conducts a commission examination twice a year on compulsory subjects and the school issues him a report card. If he fails at the end of the assessment period (at the end of the school year), the headmaster of the umbrella school would have the right to cancel the individual education. In Poland, it has been legally possible to carry out homeschooling since 1991, namely in kindergartens (ISCED 0), primary schools (ISCED 2, 3), grammar schools or secondary

<sup>1</sup> *Life learning* is also used as a synonym for the term unschooling.

<sup>2</sup> Education experts in this country recommend replacing the term compulsory schooling with compulsory education (Rochovská & Mazur, 2019).

schools (ISCED 3). For this form of fulfilling school attendance, the term *edukacja domowa (home education)* is used. It is the duty of the parents of homeschooled children, to provide co-operation in each school year, to submit the child to examination and classification. If a student did not succeed, his parents would be deprived of the right to homeschooling (Rochovská & Mazur, 2019; Rochovská et al., 2019; Mickiewicz, 2014).

Despite the fact that the possibility of unschooling as a form of homeschooling is not permitted by law in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland<sup>3</sup>, 14.12 % parents of homeschooled children from these countries, who participated in the research of Rochovská et al. (2019), said that they practice unschooling. In Slovakia, it was 15.69% of parents, in the Czech Republic, 18.75%, and in Poland, 9.86% of parents. Similarly, Kašparová (2012, 2015, 2019) states that the popularity of unschooling among parents of homeschooled children is growing in the Czech Republic.

On the other hand, many qualified educators have reservations about the application of unschooling. This may also be due to the fact that many parents interpret the term unschooling differently. Some of them identify unschooling with an upbringing style that gives the child maximum freedom, and the child does only what he or she wants. However, it is a misunderstanding of unschooling, which does not correspond to the philosophy of Holt, who identified with the fact that man is a social creature and needs to integrate into a society, which could not function without rules and conventions (Kašparová, 2019). Thus, even a child of unschoolers must learn to respect the rules and abide by conventions.

The research by Kašparová (2019), focused on homeschooling in the Czech Republic, confirmed discrepancies in the perception of unschooling by parents of homeschooled children. The headmistress of the umbrella school, which oversees the homeschooling of children, stated her experiences with parents who misperceived unschooling: *“They think that it is enough for them to leave the child to his own devices, but it is not about that at all”* (Kašparová, 2019, p. 45). On the other hand, she also gives examples of parents who, in her opinion, correctly perceive their child’s education according to the philosophy of unschooling: *“Both parents get involved, take the child with them to work, or work from home, give him tasks, simply involve him as much as possible, and constantly motivate him by example”* (Kašparová, 2019, p. 45).

Likewise, parents of homeschooled children observe the actions of other parents of homeschooled children and feel competent to assess them if, according to them, they perceive it to be the incorrect way of unschooling. In Kašparová’s research (2019, p. 46), one mother from the Czech Republic commented on the behaviour of her friend’s homeschooled child, that they stopped meeting her and her child, as the child did not have any boundaries, was allowed to do what he wanted at home, was disobedient and took other children’s toys and was ruining things. The mother stated: *“I will not justify this by saying that he needs to examine everything and that he is an energetic child ... I think he is just rude. Our boys don’t want to meet him.”*

In any case, even if the parents of homeschooled children also decide to practice unschooling, if they want their child to remain in homeschooling they must pass compulsory testing. Although the legislation requires it, it does not define its specific form. It is up to the headmaster of the umbrella school how it will be ensured. Some teachers who carry out this compulsory examination use more

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<sup>3</sup> The law does not directly prohibit the practice of unschooling. Parents are free to choose the methods and forms of their children’s homeschooling, however, as part of the compulsory testing at the umbrella school, the child must succeed. For many children this is not a problem. In the research of Mazur et al. (2019), some parents practicing unschooling claimed that their child had no problem with the compulsory testing, because his level of knowledge was even higher than that required for the testing in the given year.

traditional forms (written tests, oral examination, choice of tasks corresponding to the tasks from the textbooks used in school, etc.). Some schools are inclining towards other forms of testing, e.g. through a demonstration of the student's portfolio and an interview with them, or a demonstration of the presentations created by the student. Therefore, many parents of homeschooled children are considering choosing an umbrella school for their child. The research carried out by Rochovská et al. (2019) has confirmed that 36.45% of parents chose a school for their child according to its experience with homeschooling and 16.82% according to the form of compulsory testing. The research also mapped the parents' views on the compulsory testing process (Table 1) and problems during the compulsory testing (Table 2).

**Table 1**

*The process of compulsory testing from the point of view of the parents of homeschooled children from Poland (PL), the Czech Republic (CZ) and Slovakia (SK) (Rochovská et al., 2019, p. 73).*

Answers of the respondents	PL		CZ		SK		Aggregate	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Satisfaction, without problems and in a pleasant atmosphere	20	47.62	17	36.17	10	43.48	47	41.96
Oral exam (interview with the child)	8	19.05	9	19.15	2	8.70	19	16.96
Written exam (test)	10	23.81	7	14.89	3	13.04	20	17.86
Portfolio presentation	0	0.00	7	14.89	1	4.35	8	7.14
Sample presentations, created by the child	3	7.14	1	2.13	1	4.35	5	4.46
Dissatisfaction	0	0.00	4	8.51	2	8.70	6	5.36
The child has not been tested yet	0	0.00	1	2.13	2	8.70	3	2.68
Other	1	2.38	1	2.13	2	8.70	4	3.57

**Table 2**

*Problems during compulsory testing as mentioned by parents of homeschooled children from Poland (PL), the Czech Republic (CZ) and Slovakia (SK) (Rochovská et al., 2019, p. 73).*

Answers of the respondents	PL		CZ		SK		Aggregate	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Lack of understanding of homeschooling by some teachers	1	7.14	2	22.22	4	50.00	7	22.58
Bad timing/long waiting/loss of time	4	28.57	2	22.22	0	0.00	6	19.35
Nervousness of the child	1	7.14	1	11.11	2	25.00	4	12.90
Dissatisfaction of the examiner	2	14.29	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	6.45
Other	6	42.86	4	44.44	2	25.00	12	38.71

The research showed that majority of parents of homeschooled children expressed satisfaction with the compulsory testing and only limited number of parents stated that they were dissatisfied. The others only stated in what form the testing took place, e.g. orally, in writing. Small number of the parents mentioned a sample of the portfolio or presentations created by the child.

When asked about the problems they encountered during the testing, 58.97% of parents said that they had no problems and 41.03% of parents stated some problems. The biggest problem from the

point of view of these parents was the lack of understanding of homeschooling by some teachers (22.58%), which may indicate whether they were the parents practicing unschooling.

Kašparová's research (2019) was also about the problems of compulsory examination. In the Czech Republic, the law does not strictly prescribe its form. The research shows, among other things, the negative experience of one mother of a homeschooled child: *"Everything was new for the headmistress. I think she was quite afraid of it ... In addition, during the exams, she ignored the fact that we had agreed on project teaching, which means that we simply can't catch up with everything that is in those textbooks. At the end of the year, she tested Dany in front of his entire former class, from everything they had learned during that semester. As if it was a punishment for him because we had it arranged differently. It was horrible and completely stressful for all of us"* (Kašparová, 2019, p. 159). This example, in the context of the information presented in Tables 1 and 2, shows that the experience of a compulsory examination in an umbrella school may be diametrically different for each individual homeschooled child. Porubčanová et al. (2021) say about compulsory examination in the Czech Republic that some schools use common school methods to evaluate the children's results, thus influencing the content and form of homeschooling. They evaluate the effectiveness of this education according to one-off results, for example by means of didactic tests. It can be added that such a form of examination is not in line with the philosophy of unschooling, and if the parents have applied unschooling the child could have problems with compulsory examination, as was the case in the mother's statement above. The whole course of compulsory examination and the determination of its form is at the discretion of the school headmaster, who may also agree to monitor the learning progress of the child through a portfolio. This form of examination is also beneficial for children who are educated with the application of unschooling. It is also in line with the recommendations of the Czech School Inspectorate, that the school and the educator agree on the management of a portfolio which would include work, various projects, and other outputs of the child (as determined by the school headmaster), during which time this portfolio should be considered when assessing the pupil. Thus, the portfolio should not be the only form of evaluation but may be used in combination with another form of examination (e.g., a test). In the research carried out by Rochovská et al. (2019), however, only 14.89% of parents from the Czech Republic mentioned the portfolio as one of the forms of evaluation.

Another pitfall of examination for children led by the philosophy of unschooling can be the grade on the half-year and end of year certificate. Porubčanová et al. (2021) cite the results of field research, where many parents of homeschooled children have expressed their opinion of evaluating children other than by awarding a grade, while psychologists also agree that a grade is not the only way to assess the effectiveness of education. Parents and their homeschooled children from Slovakia and Poland also face similar problems (Porubčanová et al., 2021; Gieraacz-Borkowska, 2019; Bočková, 2020; Bočková et al., 2020; Droščák, 2020).

It can be stated that in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, the issue of unschooling in connection with compulsory testing in an umbrella school is not examined in sufficient detail and the ambition of this research is to contribute to solving these problems.

### ***Research problem***

The research problem was formulated on the basis of several realised studies dealing with the given topic (Rochovská & Mazur, 2019; Rochovská et al., 2019; Mazur et al., 2019; Kašparová, 2012, 2019). As mentioned above, it was found that 14.12% of the parents of homeschooled children from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, who participated in the research of Rochovská et al. (2019), preferred unschooling. Others preferred methods were working with a textbook (8.82%), a



workbook (5.29%) or reading, writing and speaking (8.24 %). The research of Mazur et al. (2019) did not confirm the hypothesis that children whose parents selected an umbrella school on the basis of experience with homeschooling and in the form of a compulsory testing would have less problems during this testing than children whose parents selected an umbrella school according to other criteria.

For this reason, this research focused on examining other factors, which could influence compulsory testing, namely the choice of methods and the forms of homeschooling.

The research problem thus became the examination of an impact of methods and forms of homeschooling on the problems during compulsory testing in the umbrella school. The aim of the research was to find out, on the basis of the opinions of the parents of homeschooled children on the preference of methods and forms of home education, whether they encountered any problems during the compulsory testing. Based on the objective of the research, and in connection with the results of the aforementioned research, the research questions (RQ<sub>1</sub>, RQ<sub>2</sub>, RQ<sub>3</sub>) and the hypotheses (H<sub>1</sub>, H<sub>2</sub>) were formulated:

RQ<sub>1</sub>: How is unschooling perceived by the parents of homeschooled children from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, who comment on its application?

RQ<sub>2</sub>: What are the typical problems of children of unschoolers during the compulsory testing in an umbrella school?

RQ<sub>3</sub>: What are the typical problems of the children of parents, who prefer classical methods and forms of homeschooling, during compulsory testing in an umbrella school?

H<sub>1</sub> The respondents, who prefer unschooling during their children's homeschooling, face more problems during compulsory testing than the respondents, who prefer other methods and forms of homeschooling.

H<sub>2</sub> The respondents, who prefer classical methods and forms of homeschooling (working with a textbook and workbook, reading, writing and talking) for their children, face less problems during compulsory testing than the respondents, who prefer other methods and forms of homeschooling

## Research methodology

### *The research sample*

78 parents of homeschooled children took part in the research, of which 30 were from Poland (PL), 27 from the Czech Republic (CZ) and 21 from Slovakia (SK). The research sample consisted of 89.74% women and 10.26% men, the age of the respondents ranged from 21 to 60 years. Most respondents homeschooled one child (66.67%) or two children (23.08%); rarely more children. 34.57% of respondents stated that they have a pedagogical education, but most of their pedagogical experience was shorter than 5 years.

### *Research tools and procedures*

A mixed research strategy was applied in the research. The research method was a questionnaire method, and an online structured questionnaire consisting of ten open items was used as a research tool.

In the first question, the respondents expressed how many children they homeschool, and in the second question, what their age is. The third item investigated whether they had any difficulties in approving the application for the individual (home) schooling of the child. The fourth item

focused on how the parents chose a school for their child. The fifth item investigated if they needed a guarantor with pedagogical education. In the sixth item, the respondents answered why and how they chose this guarantor. The seventh item was focused on finding out which methods and forms of homeschooling the respondents chose. In the eighth item, they were supposed to describe how the compulsory examination of the child in the umbrella school took place. In the ninth item, they commented on whether they encountered any difficulties in examining the child. The tenth item was intended for parents who still needed to comment on the topic of the individual (home) schooling of their child. In addition, sociodemographic information was collected.

The items of the questionnaire were created based on the authors' experience in the field and also based on a content analysis of those scientific studies dealing with the subject problematic, as well as a consultation with experts who have been dealing with the problems of homeschooling for a long time, thus ensuring the validity of the questionnaire.

Three items (No.7, 8, and 9) were evaluated to verify the established research questions and hypotheses. The respondents commented on which methods and forms they prefer during their children's homeschooling, how the compulsory testing was carried out and what problems they encountered during the compulsory testing of their children.

The questionnaire was administered online through social groups focused on homeschooling in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the return rate of the questionnaires.

### *Data analysis*

Quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in the evaluation of the data. Through open coding, codes were created from the answers of the respondents, which were then grouped into categories. The most numerous category was "unschooling" (14.12%), which included all the statements of the respondents (codes) directly referring to unschooling, as well as statements corresponding to the philosophy of unschooling, e.g.: "self-appointed education", "free, what the child enjoys", "child educates himself", etc. The second category was named "classical methods and forms" and three subcategories were included there: "working with a textbook" (8.82%), "reading, writing and talking" (8.24%), and "working with a workbook" (5.29%). From the respondents' answers, concerning the problems during the compulsory testing, the categories "no problems during the testing" and "problems during the testing" were created.

The aforementioned main categories have become variables in formulating hypotheses. The hypotheses were statistically tested. Pearson's Chi-squared test of independence was used to verify the data.

The technique of contrasting was applied during the qualitative data processing. For comparison, both the answers of the respondents who prefer unschooling and, on the other hand, the answers of the respondents who prefer classical methods and forms of education, were selected. Subsequently, the responses were analysed and interpreted.

## **Research results**

### *Unschooling from the point of view of the parents of homeschooled children*

During the question concerning the applied methods and forms of homeschooling, the respondents either directly mentioned the term "unschooling" or other statements, which correspond to the

philosophy of unschooling. These respondents claimed that their children had **self-directed education**, such as:

- “We deal with topics that children begin themselves, or topics that somehow arise from life situations...”
- “... The rest of the education (thus the optional education), which makes up more than 99% of her actual education, is managed by my daughter herself and she uses the forms and methods that she chooses herself in the given topic and at a given moment in time...”
- “I give the child the freedom to choose the methods and forms of education.”
- “None, that means a natural education. The child learns on his own accord.”

Thus, the respondents perceived their child as an independent being, who can responsibly decide what to do and in what way. In addition, the respondents emphasised that they **support the interests of the child**, such as:

- “I support what my daughter enjoys in any given moment ...”
- “Monitoring the interests of the child ...”

The respondents also commented on “supplementing” unschooling with **other methods and forms**, such as:

- “... education through games, real life situations and in the field on trips and excursions, the Hejny’s Mathematics, the Montessori approach and teaching aids.”
- “... Hejny Method in mathematics, mind maps, experiential teaching ...”.

However, unschooling is not just a method, form or educational strategy, but in most cases it is a philosophy of life, which affects entire families (the so-called unschoolers). It is not possible to do unschooling only partially. In its traditional form, unschooling knows no curriculum, specified subject matter nor testing. However, families who want to practice unschooling and want their children to be allowed homeschooling must have the children knowledgeably prepared in order that they can pass the exam at the end of the school year. Therefore, this third category was included in the category of answers concerning unschooling, where the unschooling is supplemented also by other methods and forms. In addition, the term “partial unschooling” was used, which is practically not in line with the philosophy of unschooling, but since in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland it is possible to homeschool children only if they succeed in compulsory testing, we have left such answers in the “unschooling” category, e.g. “*Partial unschooling, but also guided education for the necessary things to do with testing. Things, which my daughter enjoys at a given moment, I support, I suggest how to implement it into the school and how to further develop it. Guided education took place in the Czech language during reading and writing, now it is more free.*”

### ***Problems with compulsory testing in the umbrella school***

The problems, which are mentioned by the respondents, can be divided into three main categories. In the first category, it is the **subjective negative evaluation of the course of testing** by the respondents, either as a whole or only some of its aspects, or the behaviour of the examiner. This category was composed of the respondent’s answers, regardless of whether it was the respondents preferring unschooling or respondents preferring other methods and forms of homeschooling, because there were no significant differences in the answers. Respondents who prefer unschooling stated, for example:

- “... it is not a suitable form at all ...” (author’s note: compulsory testing).
- “In the first school, it was exhausting and outrageous.”
- “They had no understanding of the differences, a different pace.”



The respondents preferring other methods and forms of homeschooling stated, for example:

- “Not understanding the questions that are commonly posed to the children at school, but not at home.”
- “The teacher was biased against the homeschooled children, she was not willing to cooperate ...”
- “The class teacher is a pretty weird person.”
- “Incomprehension of homeschooling by some teachers.”

The second category includes subjective **statements regarding the respondents’ fear** of how the testing will end up, with no difference between the respondents who prefer unschooling (e.g. “stress of the parent”, “my exam fever”) and the respondents, who prefer other methods and forms of homeschooling (e.g. “not from the side of the teachers, but rather from our side”).

The third category includes **descriptions of specific situations or the behaviour of the examiner**. From the answers of the respondents preferring unschooling, there was only one answer: “The nonsensical adherence of the umbrella teacher to the literal wording of the answers according to the given textbooks, no possibility to choose one’s own textbooks.” This approach, which is described by the respondent, is completely contrary to the philosophy of unschooling, and even the law does not specify that the student must reproduce the curriculum from the textbooks used by the school.

The respondents, who preferred other methods and forms of education stated, for example:

- “The teacher did not give scope to all the children during the oral examination, only a selected few.”
- “A lack of interest in the child’s portfolio.”
- “One of the teachers carried out only the written part of the exam. The teacher did not consult test results with us at all.”

However, it is not possible to assess these answers in terms of whether they are justified complaints, as it is not clear whether parents and examining teachers have consulted the form and modalities of the testing in advance.

### ***A preference for unschooling and the problems with compulsory testing in an umbrella school***

The data on the preferred methods and forms and the problems in compulsory testing as stated by the respondents, are presented in a contingency table (Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Preference for methods and forms of homeschooling and the problems during testing*

	Current frequency			Expected frequency	
	Preference for unschooling (24)	Preference for other methods and forms (54)		Preference for unschooling	Preference for other methods and forms
Without problems during the testing (46)	17	29	Without problems during the testing	14.15	31.85
Problems during the testing	7	25	Problems during the testing	9.85	22.15

\* in addition to unschooling

Of the respondents who preferred unschooling ( $n = 24$ ), 17 (70.83%) said that the compulsory testing went without problems and 7 (29.17%) said that they had encountered problems. Of the respondents who preferred other methods and forms of homeschooling in addition to unschooling ( $n = 54$ ), 29 (53.70%) said that the compulsory testing went without problems and 25 (46.30%) said that they had encountered problems.

Pearson's Chi-squared test of independence was used to verify the hypothesis. There was no statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2(1) = 2.015$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.156$ ) between the respondents who preferred unschooling and those who preferred other methods and forms of homeschooling in problems during the testing. Hypothesis  $H_1$  was rejected.

### *Preference for classical methods and forms of homeschooling and the problems in compulsory testing in an umbrella school*

The data on the preferred methods and forms and the problems in compulsory testing provided by the respondents are presented in a contingency table (Table 4).

**Table 4**

*Preference for methods and forms of homeschooling and the problems during testing*

	Current frequency			Expected frequency	
	Preference for classic methods and forms (38)	Preference for other methods and forms* (40)		Preference for classic methods and forms	Preference for other methods and forms
Without problems during the testing (46)	24	22	Without problems during the testing	22.41	23.59
Problems during the testing	14	18	Problems during the testing	15.59	16.41

\* in addition to classical methods and forms

From the respondents who preferred classical methods and forms of homeschooling ( $n = 38$ ), 24 (63.16%) stated that the compulsory testing went without any problems and 14 (36.84%) said that they had encountered problems. From the respondents who preferred methods and forms of homeschooling in addition to the classical methods and forms ( $n = 40$ ), 22 (55%) stated that the compulsory testing went without any problems and 18 (45%) said that they had encountered problems.

Pearson's Chi-squared test of independence was used to verify the hypothesis. No statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2(1) = 0.536$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.464$ ) was found in problems during the testing between the respondents who preferred classical methods and forms, and those who preferred other methods and forms of homeschooling. Hypothesis  $H_2$  was rejected.

## **Discussion**

The research has not confirmed that respondents, who preferred unschooling during their children's homeschooling, encountered more problems during the compulsory testing than respondents who preferred other methods and forms of homeschooling. It was also found that the respondents who preferred classical methods and forms of homeschooling for their children (work with a textbook and workbook, reading, writing and talking) did not encounter less problems during the compulsory

testing than the respondents who preferred other methods and forms of homeschooling. Thus, neither a preference for unschooling nor a preference for classical methods of forms of homeschooling were the cause of the problems that the respondents and their children experienced during the compulsory testing in an umbrella school.

In a survey by Mazur et al. (2019), the parents of homeschooled children stated that they often encountered a lack of understanding among teachers during the compulsory testing, who they said did not understand alternative methods and forms of education. The parents complained that they cannot fully respect the interests and needs of their homeschooled child, because they are limited by the compulsory curriculum and specified topics to teach for individual years. However, our research has not confirmed that the problems during the compulsory testing in the umbrella school are caused exclusively by the choice of methods and forms of homeschooling.

The limits of the research lie in the size of the sample file, which was not representative. However, there are no official lists of so-called unschoolers, which would allow the researcher to randomly select a representative sample from all of the respondents, or to force parents to participate in the research. Many parents practicing unschooling may have concerns about disclosing that they are unschoolers, as this form of education is not officially recognised in the examined countries.

Kašparová (2019) states on the examples of overseas studies (MacGarth, 2010; Griffith, 1997) that this seemingly alternative form of education meets the needs of contemporary Western society and that the so-called unschoolers integrate seamlessly into the wider society.

## **Conclusions**

The conclusions of the research may contribute to a more detailed knowledge of the issue of unschooling in countries, where it is not a recognised legal alternative to homeschooling – in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland. The conclusions can be useful not only for researchers dealing with the given topic, but also for the Ministries of Education of the examined individual countries and, last but not least, for the parents of homeschooled children.

It was found that the parents of homeschooled children perceived unschooling mainly as self-arranged education, the support of the child's interests, and also supplemented it with other methods and forms of education. Problems with compulsory testing in the umbrella school were, from the respondents' point of view, presented as subjectively negative evaluations of the testing process, statements concerning the respondents' fears and descriptions of specific situations or the behaviour of the examiner. Research has also shown that the choice of methods and forms of homeschooling did not affect whether the parents and children are more likely to encounter problems during compulsory testing.

The research findings present implications for further, mostly qualitative research. It would be desirable to find out how parents practicing unschooling perceive this form of homeschooling and whether their views and practices coincide with its basic philosophy. Another research effort could be to describe whether and how parents practicing unschooling in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland check whether the child has learned everything that the year's curriculum specifies. Furthermore, further hypotheses could be formulated on the basis of a series of observations of the course of compulsory testing for the children of "unschoolers".

The results of deeper qualitative research in unschooler families in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland could be an incentive to improve and set up a system of compulsory testing, which could appreciate the benefits of unschooling and, on the other hand, guide parents who misunderstand its basic philosophy.

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# Unschooling vs. Classic Methods and Forms of Homeschooling from the Perspective of the Parents of Homeschooled Children

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## Summary

Unschooling can be considered as a form of homeschooling. It differs from other forms of homeschooling in that it has no curriculum. Unschooling is not only a philosophy of education, but also a lifestyle for many families. Learning is perceived here as a lifelong process. It is important that children have a suitable environment created for self-education, in which they can communicate freely across different age groups and freely learn the main instruments of culture.

In many countries, unschooling is a legitimate alternative to school education, e.g. in England or the United States of America. On the other hand, the possibility of unschooling as a form of homeschooling is not permitted by law in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland. Nevertheless, 14.12% of parents of homeschooled children from these countries said that they practice unschooling. It can be stated that in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, the issue of unschooling in connection with compulsory testing in an umbrella school is not examined in sufficient detail and the ambition of this research is to contribute to solving this problematic.

Therefore, the research of the influence of the methods and forms of homeschooling on the problems of compulsory testing in an umbrella school became a research problem. The aim of the research was to find out, on the basis of the opinions of the parents of children at home, the preference of methods and forms of homeschooling, whether they encountered any problems during the compulsory testing. Based on the goal of the research, and in connection with the results of the aforementioned studies, the research questions and hypotheses were formulated: How is unschooling perceived by the parents of homeschooled children from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland, who reflect on its application? What are the typical problems of the children of unschoolers during compulsory testing in an umbrella school? What are the typical problems of the children of parents, who prefer classical methods and forms of homeschooling during compulsory testing in an umbrella school?

It can be assumed that the respondents who prefer unschooling in their children's homeschooling face more problems during the compulsory testing than the respondents who prefer other methods and forms of homeschooling. It can also be assumed that the respondents who prefer classical methods and forms of homeschooling for their children (working with a textbook and workbook, reading, writing and talking), face less problems during the compulsory testing than the respondents who prefer other methods and forms of homeschooling.

78 parents of homeschooled children took part in the research, of which 30 were from Poland (PL), 27 from the Czech Republic (CZ) and 21 from Slovakia (SK). A mixed research strategy was applied during the research. The research method was a questionnaire method, and an online structured questionnaire consisting of ten open items was used as a research tool. Three items were evaluated to verify the established research questions and hypotheses. The respondents commented on which methods and forms they prefer in their children's homeschooling, how the compulsory testing took place and what problems they encountered during the compulsory testing of their children. The questionnaire was administered online through social groups focused on home education in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the return rate of the questionnaires.



Quantitative and qualitative approaches were used in the evaluation of the data. From the answers of the respondents in the questionnaire, concerning the methods and forms of homeschooling, categories were created, which became variables in the formulation of the hypotheses. The hypotheses were statistically tested. Pearson's Chi-squared test of independence was used to verify the data. The technique of contrasting was applied in the qualitative processing of the data. For comparison, both the answers of the respondents who prefer unschooling and, on the other hand, the answers of the respondents who prefer classical methods and forms of education, were selected. Subsequently, the responses were analysed and interpreted.

Based on the research findings, it can be stated that the parents of homeschooled children perceive unschooling mainly as self-arranged education and the support of the child's interests, and also complement it with other methods and forms of education. Problems during compulsory testing in an umbrella school presented by the respondents consisted of subjectively negative evaluations of the course of the testing, statements concerning the respondents' fear and descriptions of specific situations or the behaviour of the examiner. The research has not confirmed that the respondents who preferred unschooling during the homeschooling of their children, encountered more problems during compulsory testing than the respondents who preferred other methods and forms of homeschooling. It was also found that the respondents who preferred classical methods and forms of homeschooling for their children (working with a textbook and workbook, reading, writing and talking) did not encounter less problems during the compulsory testing than the respondents who preferred other methods and forms of homeschooling. Thus, neither a preference for unschooling nor a preference for classical methods and forms of homeschooling were the cause of the problems that the respondents and their children experienced during compulsory testing in an umbrella school.

The conclusions of the research may contribute to a more detailed knowledge of the issue of unschooling in countries, where it is not recognised to be a legal alternative to homeschooling – in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland. The conclusions can be useful, not only for researchers dealing with the topic, but also for the Ministries of Education of the individual countries studied and, last but not least, for the parents of homeschooled children.

The research findings present implications for further, mostly qualitative research. It would be desirable to find out how parents practicing unschooling perceive this form of homeschooling and whether their views and practices are agreeing with its basic philosophy. Another research effort could be to describe whether and how parents practicing unschooling in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland check whether the child has learned everything specified by the curriculum of the school year. Furthermore, further hypotheses could be formulated on the basis of a series of observations of the course of compulsory testing for the children of "unschoolers".

The results of deeper qualitative research in the families of unschoolers in Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland could be an incentive to improve and set up a system of compulsory testing, which could appreciate the benefits of unschooling and, on the other hand, guide parents who misunderstand its basic philosophy.

The research is a partial output of the projects, VEGA Project No. 1/0522/19 "Creation of Inclusive Environment in Nursery School and Inclusive Approaches in Diagnostics and Stimulation of the Development of Socially Disadvantaged Children" and KEGA Project No. 004KU-4/2019 "Artists in Nursery School – Interpretation of Artwork in Pre-primary Education".

## Savaiminio mokymosi ir klasikiniai metodai bei formos tėvų, mokančių vaikus namuose, vertinimu

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### Santrauka

Savaiminis ugdymas (pirmenybė teikiama besimokančiojo pasirinktai veiklai) gali būti vertinamas kaip mokymosi namuose forma. Ši ugdymo forma skiriasi nuo kitų mokymosi namuose formų, nes neturi mokymosi programos. Savaiminis ugdymas – ne tik ugdymo filosofija, bet ir daugelio šeimų gyvenimo būdas. Mokymasis čia suvokiamas kaip visą gyvenimą trunkantis procesas. Svarbu, kad vaikams būtų sukurta saviugdai tinkama aplinka, kurioje įvairaus amžiaus grupių vaikai galėtų laisvai bendrauti ir mokytis pagrindinių dalykų, susijusių su kultūra.

Daugelyje šalių (pavyzdžiui, Anglijoje ar Jungtinėse Amerikos Valstijose) savaiminis ugdymas yra teisėta mokyklinio ugdymo alternatyva. Slovakijos, Čekijos ir Lenkijos įstatymai savaiminio ugdymo neleidžia traktuoti mokymosi namuose forma. Nepaisant to, 14,12 proc. minėtose šalyse gyvenančių tėvų, kurių vaikai ugdomi namuose, teigia praktikuojantys savaiminį ugdymą. Slovakijoje, Čekijoje ir Lenkijoje savaiminio ugdymo ir privalomų egzaminų alternatyvaus ugdymo mokykloje, t. y. vaikus ugdant namuose, problema išnagrinėta nepakankamai išsamiai. Šio tyrimo tikslas – prisidėti prie minėtos problemos sprendimo.

Pristatomo tyrimo problema sietina su mokymosi namuose metodų ir formų reikšme privalomajam testavimui. Tyrimo tikslas – remiantis tėvų, pirmenybę teikiančių vaikų ugdymo namuose metodams ir formoms, nuomonėmis, atskleisti, su kokiais iššūkiais jų vaikai susiduria privalomojo pasiekimų vertinimo (testavimo) metu.

Tyrimo probleminiai klausimai ir hipotezės. Kaip vaikų, nelankančių mokyklų, tėvai reflektuoja savo patirtis apie vaikų mokymąsi namuose Slovakijoje, Čekijoje ir Lenkijoje? Su kokiomis problemomis susiduria namuose besimokantys vaikai per privalomą egzaminą? Kokios yra tipiškos tėvų, pirmenybę teikiančių klasiikiniam mokymo namuose metodams ir formoms, problemos per privalomus testavimus mokykloje?

Tyrimo dalyvavo 78 tėvai, kurių vaikai mokosi namuose (30 tėvų iš Lenkijos, 27 iš Čekijos, 21 iš Slovakijos). Atliekant tyrimą, taikyta mišri tyrimo strategija. Atlikta internetinė apklausa, naudojant struktūruotą klausimyną, apimantį dešimt atvirųjų klausimų. Siekiant patikrinti iškeltus tyrimo klausimus ir hipotezes, įvertinti trys aspektai: respondentai nurodė, kokiems mokymosi namuose metodams ir formoms jie teikia pirmenybę, ugdydami vaikus namuose; kaip vyko privalomasis žinių patikrinimas; kokių problemų kilo atliekant privalomąjį vaikų žinių patikrinimą. Klausimynas buvo platinamas socialinėse grupėse, orientuotose į vaikų ugdymą namuose, Slovakijoje, Čekijoje ir Lenkijoje, todėl nebuvo galimybės įvertinti klausimynų grįžtamumo rodiklių.

Duomenims analizuoti taikytos kiekybinė ir kokybinė priemonės. Iš anketose pateiktų respondentų atsakymų apie mokymosi namuose būdus ir formas išskirtos tam tikros kategorijos, kurios vėliau tapo kintamaisiais formuluojant hipotezes. Hipotezės patikrintos statistiškai. Duomenims tikrinti taikytas Chi kvadrato testas. Duomenis apdorojant kokybiškai, remtasi lyginamuoju metodu. Lyginti tiek respondentų, teikiančių pirmenybę mokymuisi namuose, tiek ir respondentų, teikiančių pirmenybę klasiikiniam ugdymo metodams ir formoms, atsakymai. Vėliau šie atsakymai buvo analizuojami detaliau ir interpretuojami.

Remiantis gautais tyrimo rezultatais, galima teigti, kad namuose besimokančių vaikų tėvai savaiminį ugdymą dažniausiai suvokia kaip savarankiškai organizuojamą ugdymą, kaip galimybę atliepti vaiko interesus. Šią ugdymo formą linkstama papildyti kitais ugdymo metodais ir formomis. Respondentų nuomone, problemos, kurių kyla privalomojo žinių patikrinimo metu, sietinos su subjektyviai neigiamu žinių patikrinimo vertinimu, su teiginiais, atspindinčiais respondentų baimes, ir su specifinių situacijų ar egzaminuotojo elgesio aprašymais. Tyrimas nepatvirtino, kad respondentai, pirmenybę teikę savaiminiam vaikų mokymuisi namuose, privalomojo žinių patikrinimo metu susidūrė su daugiau problemų negu pirmenybę teikusieji kitiems mokymosi namuose metodams ir formoms.

Taip pat nustatyta, kad respondentai, pirmenybę teikę tradiciniams vaikų mokymosi namuose metodams ir formoms (darbas su vadovėliu ir sąsiuviniais, skaitymas, rašymas ir kalbėjimas), privalomojo žinių patikrinimo metu nesušidūrė su mažiau problemų negu respondentai, pirmenybę teikę kitiems mokymosi namuose metodams ir formoms. Taigi problemų, su kuriomis vaikai susidūrė atlikdami privalomuosius žinių patikrinimo testus alternatyvaus ugdymo mokykloje, nenustatyta nė vienoje iš minėtų respondentų grupių.

Tyrimo išvados gali prisidėti prie išsamesnio savaiminio ugdymo problemos suvokimo Slovakijoje, Čekijoje ir Lenkijoje, t. y. šalyse, kuriose savaiminis ugdymas nėra pripažinta legalia mokymosi namuose alternatyva. Išvados gali būti naudingos ne tik šią temą nagrinėjantiems tyrėjams, bet ir atskirų tiriamų šalių Švietimo ministerijoms, galiausiai, namuose besimokančių vaikų tėvams.

Tyrimo išvados svarbios tolesniems, labiau kokybiniais tyrimams įgyvendinti. Tikslinga išsiaiškinti, kaip tėvai, praktikuojantys savaiminį ugdymą, suvokia šią mokymosi namuose formą ir ar jų pažiūros ir praktika atitinka pagrindinę šio ugdymo filosofiją. Prasminga atskleisti, kaip Slovakijoje, Čekijoje ir Lenkijoje ugdymą namuose praktikuojantys tėvai tikrina, ar vaikas išmoko viską, kas nurodyta ugdymo programoje. Remiantis namuose ugdomų vaikų privalomųjų žinių patikrinimo rezultatais, būtų galima formuluoti tolesnes hipotezes.

Šis tyrimas – tai VEGA projekto (Nr. 1/0522/19) „Inkliuzinės aplinkos kūrimas darželyje ir įtraukus požiūris į socialiai remtinų vaikų raidos diagnostiką ir skatinimą“ ir KEGA projekto (Nr. 004KU-4 /2019) „Menininkai lopšelyje-darželyje – meno kūrybinių interpretacija priešmokykliniame ugdyme“ dalinis rezultatas.