

Contested Educational Futures: A Qualitative Longitudinal Study of Alternative Pathways in Chinese Homeschooling

While homeschooling has been growing globally, most research on this topic relies on cross-sectional studies and parental accounts, which have lacked longitudinal evidence on how parents and children navigate challenges and sustain homeschooling during educational transitions. This gap is particularly pronounced in non-Western, high-stakes Chinese contexts where educational credentials are highly valued, and families face unique sociocultural and regulatory tensions. Without longitudinal, child-inclusive insights, policymakers and educators lack the evidence to effectively address educational diversity and emerging educational models in the post-pandemic and AI era. Accordingly, we propose a longitudinal study to investigate the educational trajectories of Chinese homeschooling families while disentangling the processes and outcomes related to child development and transitions. Building on the PI's foundational study (2021-2023) of homeschooling families in Taipei and Hong Kong—two Chinese cities with shared cultural backgrounds but differing legal approaches to homeschooling—the proposed study tracks the original cohort as their adolescent children face transitions (e.g., university admissions, vocational accreditation). We will also recruit 30-50 new families who began homeschooling recently to capture generational and contextual shifts, such as post-pandemic motivations and digital learning adaptations. The study will employ a qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) design. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with parents from both the original and new cohorts to explore their views, practices, and challenges. Interviews will also be conducted with children aged 12+ to examine their perspectives and outcomes. Observations on pedagogical interactions, family dynamics, and learning environments will complement the interview narratives—researchers will conduct field visits during typical learning times for a sub-sample of families in both cohorts (approximately 10-15, selected for diversity and willingness). An Iterative Thematic Inquiry (ITI) approach will be adopted to analyze data, along with systematic within-family and cross-cohort comparisons, to identify continuities, changes, factors shaping trajectories, and outcomes. The study's significance lies in its unique capacity to generate globally relevant knowledge on how homeschooling, as an alternative educational pathway, is sustained, adapted, or discontinued amidst challenging transitions and contexts. By longitudinally tracking families and incorporating children's voices within the Chinese context, our findings will offer theoretical insights into the negotiation of educational agency and structural constraints, while (re-)imagining educational futures relevant to societies facing the rise of emerging educational models. The findings will also inform policies on educational diversification, offering empirical evidence for designing supportive frameworks for non-traditional learning in competitive ecosystems.