



## HOME EDUCATION VOICES: EDUCATION CAPITAL AND THE VALUE OF EDUCATION

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### **Abstract:**

We present findings from a survey conducted as part of research on Home Education. The study aimed to explore the motivations, values, and experiences of home-educating families. The data, collected from 27 families, representing 52 children and young people, reveal trends in home education ideology, the value placed on different aspects of learning, and the perceived increase in educational capital for individuals. While the small sample size limits generalisability, the findings provide valuable insights into the priorities and experiences of home educators and importantly, the young people.

**Keywords:** home education; capital; Bourdieu; value of education; survey

### **1. Introduction**

Home education is a growing phenomenon that challenges traditional schooling models by offering families autonomy over their children's learning experiences. This study investigates how capital is transferred and maintained within home-educating families, focusing on the role of both parents and children in shaping educational capital. The research builds on Bourdieu's (2018, 2011) theories of capital reproduction while extending the discussion to consider whether children contribute to the educational capital of their parents (Davies & Rizk, 2018). The study fills a critical gap in the literature by incorporating children's perspectives and assessing changes in educational capital within a home learning environment.

Home education has been widely researched in terms of pedagogy and curriculum (Liberto, 2016), parental motivations (Beck, 2010; Morton, 2010; Rothermel, 2003; Spiegler, 2010), and special educational needs (Rothermel, 2004). However, there has been limited exploration of how educational capital evolves in home-educating families and how children's contributions to learning are valued.

This study is timely given ongoing policy reviews on home education in the UK and Scotland. There is an urgent need to assess how home-educating families perceive

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and value education, particularly in relation to the resources, people, and spaces that shape their learning experiences. Additionally, the research examines the differences between value and motivation in home education. Value is understood as an appraisal of home education's effectiveness, while motivation refers to the psychological factors that influence a family's decision to home-educate (Rothermel, 2003). This distinction is critical for understanding why families choose home education and how they perceive its benefits.

We also differentiate between various models of home education, including home-schooling, unschooling, and other types of alternative provision. Home-schooling replicates formal schooling within the home, often following structured curricula (English, 2020). Unschooling, in contrast, prioritises child-led learning without rigid timetables, allowing children to explore their interests freely (Liberto, 2016). Alternative provision encompasses any educational arrangements outside of mainstream schooling, including home education for children with special needs or those excluded from school. Understanding these distinctions is essential for contextualising the survey findings.

## 2. Literature Review

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how individuals navigate social structures and accumulate resources that influence their opportunities and social mobility. Bourdieu (1986) expands the traditional economic definition of capital to include social capital (networks and relationships), cultural capital (knowledge, skills, and education), and symbolic capital (prestige and recognition). These interconnected forms of capital shape individuals' access to power and resources, reinforcing social hierarchies and influencing life outcomes (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Education plays a fundamental role in the transference and reproduction of capital, as schools act as institutions that privilege certain forms of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1986) argues that families with high cultural capital—such as exposure to literature, academic discourse, and the arts—position their children for success in educational settings. Conversely, students from backgrounds with lower cultural capital may struggle to meet institutional expectations, leading to disparities in achievement and reinforcing class divisions (Reay, 2004). These dynamics highlight the importance of habitus, or the ingrained dispositions that shape how individuals perceive and interact with education.

Home education presents an alternative framework for the reproduction and transformation of capital outside of institutionalised schooling. Unlike traditional educational systems that reinforce dominant cultural capital, home education allows families to construct their own learning environments, where different forms of capital can be prioritised and transmitted. Research suggests that home educators often emphasise experiential and interest-led learning, fostering a broader conception of cultural and educational capital that challenges traditional measures of academic success (Rothermel, 2002).

A key consideration in the study of home education is the reciprocal transference of capital between parents and children. Traditional educational models assume a unidirectional flow of capital from adults to children, as parents impart knowledge and skills through structured schooling. However, home education settings allow for more dynamic exchanges, where children's learning experiences contribute to the educational capital of parents as well. Davies and Rizk (2018) highlight the intergenerational exchange of knowledge, suggesting that parents engaged in home education often develop new skills, expand their cultural knowledge, and refine their pedagogical approaches through the learning process.

This perspective aligns with Bourdieu's concept of field, which posits that individuals operate within distinct social arenas where capital is accumulated and exchanged (Bourdieu, 1986). The home as an educational field presents unique opportunities for capital transfer, as learning occurs through shared experiences rather than standardised curricula. This challenges traditional notions of capital reproduction, suggesting that home-educating families engage in a more fluid and interactive process of knowledge-building (Rothermel, 2010).

Furthermore, the flexibility of home education allows families to redefine what constitutes valuable capital. Standardised testing and formal qualifications, often central to academic capital in traditional schooling, may be de-emphasised in favour of self-directed learning, critical thinking, and real-world applications of knowledge (English, 2016). This alternative valuation of capital suggests that home education has the potential to disrupt conventional power dynamics in education, offering a broader perspective on how knowledge and skills are cultivated and assessed.

The implications of Bourdieu's capital theory for home education research are significant. By examining how capital is accumulated, exchanged, and transformed within home-educating families, scholars can gain deeper insights into the ways education shapes social mobility and individual agency. Future research should continue exploring the interplay between different forms of capital in home education, particularly in relation to social integration, economic outcomes, and policy considerations.

In conclusion, Bourdieu's theory of capital provides a valuable lens for understanding the complexities of home education. The reciprocal nature of capital transfer in home education environments challenges traditional models of educational capital reproduction and underscores the diverse ways in which knowledge and learning are valued. This study contributes to ongoing discussions on educational equity and the evolving role of non-traditional learning environments in shaping individual and collective capital.

### 3. Methodology

Researchers often use surveys in their methodology to collect large amounts of data efficiently and anonymously, making them particularly useful for studies involving sensitive topics (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Surveys allow for quantitative and qualitative data collection, facilitating statistical analysis and thematic exploration

(Bryman, 2016). However, they also have limitations, including response bias and limited depth compared to qualitative interviews (Fowler, 2013).

For this study, a survey was chosen based on feedback from a pilot study involving home educators. Participants emphasised the importance of anonymity due to concerns about scrutiny from authorities, aligning with previous research indicating that home educators highly value privacy (Rothermel, 2011; Amber-Fensham Smith, 2021). The survey provided a method for participants to contribute without fear of identification, enhancing the reliability of responses while ensuring the inclusion of diverse perspectives within the home-educating community.

This research is structured around three key questions:

- 1) How do home-educating families, particularly children, value education?
- 2) Is there a relationship between families' valuation of education and their educational capital?
- 3) How is educational capital reproduced within home-educating environments?

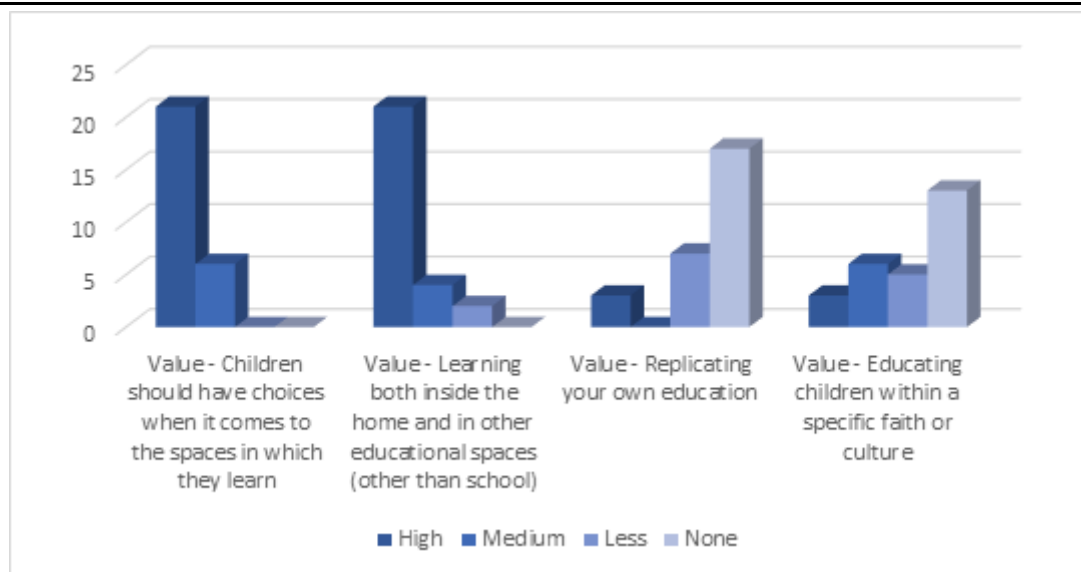
By addressing these questions, the study aims to provide new insights into the dynamics of home education and the ways in which educational capital is cultivated, transferred, and transformed within families. The findings contribute to broader discussions on educational autonomy, policy considerations, and the evolving nature of learning outside traditional school systems.

#### 4. Summary and Findings of the Survey

The survey was designed to allow participants autonomy in responding to questions, with only the ethics question being mandatory. A total of 27 participants (52 young people) consented to take part in the study.

Key findings include:

- **Home Education Status:** 81% of respondents were currently home educating, with 3 having done so in the past and 1 intending to home-educate in the future.
- **Educational Approaches:** 66% followed either self-directed learning or an eclectic educational approach.
- **Value of Learning Spaces:** 77% valued the flexibility of varied learning spaces, while replicating their own education was least valued by the adults (62%). See Figure 1.
- **Personal Development:** 92% of respondents reported an increase in their educational capital since beginning home education.
- **Learning Interactions:** 67% indicated that all members of the home education environment learned from one another to a moderate or high degree.
- **Prioritisation of Learning Factors:** When ranking the importance of people, spaces, and resources, respondents most frequently prioritised people, followed by spaces, and lastly, resources.



**Figure 1:** Survey Q5 77% valued the flexibility of varied learning spaces, while replicating their own education was least valued by the adults (62%)

## 5. Discussion of Key Findings

The findings suggest that home educators highly value flexibility, autonomy, and child-led learning. The preference for eclectic and self-directed learning approaches aligns with previous research (Liberto, 2016; Gann & Carpenter, 2019). The study also highlights the importance of varied learning environments, indicating a departure from traditional school settings.

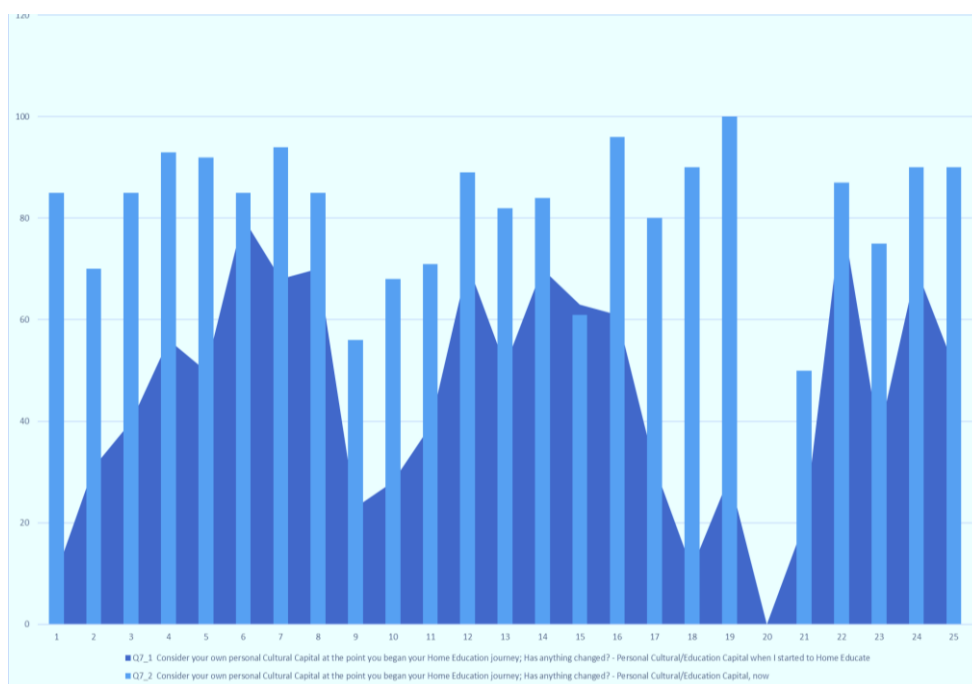
A notable result is the reported increase in educational capital among respondents. This aligns with theories of learning as a dynamic, socially constructed process (Bourdieu, 2011). The perception of increased knowledge and skills suggests that home education fosters a culture of continuous learning for both adults and children. This is significant in that home education is a space within which both adults and young people engage in development, subject knowledge and interactions with the outside world. Adults learn alongside young people in many cases, which accounts for the individual perspective that the adults have, education capital is increasing because they chose home education.

Additionally, the emphasis on social interactions within the home education environment challenges assumptions about isolation in home education (Neuman & Guterman, 2017). The survey indicates that home-educating families actively engage in knowledge exchange within their communities. Children and young people attend organised and spontaneous activities with other home-educating families. Organisations and sporting facilities often provide activities during the day time specifically for home educating families.

However, some limitations of this survey must be acknowledged. The small sample size and self-reported nature of the data restrict the generalisability of the findings. Further qualitative research, including interviews with home educators and

children, later provide a deeper understanding of these trends. Photovoice offers the young people stimulus for conversation and reflection on their experiences.

An essential component of the study was assessing how home-educating families perceive their educational capital (Figure 2). Survey Question 7 focused on the self-reported change in educational capital since beginning the home education journey. Most respondents reported an increase in their educational capital, with some indicating growth of up to 100%. The data suggests that home education provides a conducive environment for capital accumulation, though further research is necessary to understand the mechanisms driving this increase.



**Figure 2:** Survey question 7, Comparison of capital at the start of Home Education and on the day of answering the survey

In Question 8, respondents reflected on their subject knowledge across disciplines such as English, Mathematics, Sciences, Languages, and Humanities. A minority of participants (n=3) felt their capital had not increased, with one respondent suggesting only a marginal gain. This finding highlights the subjective nature of capital perception and raises questions about individual confidence in educational attainment. Conversely, multiple respondents (n=5) reported a 100% increase in their education capital, with several others (n=4) indicating an 80% increase. These responses suggest that home education fosters notable improvements in subject knowledge, though variations exist in perceived outcomes (see Figure 2).

Question 9 examined the extent of knowledge exchange within home education settings. Data indicated that learning is not unidirectional; while children primarily learn from adults, there is a significant reciprocal exchange where adults also learn from children (see Figure 3). Specifically, 14 respondents reported that they learned a moderate amount or a lot from their children. This aligns with Bourdieu's theory that capital is not solely transferred from parents to children but can also be enriched through

intergenerational interactions. The findings suggest that home education environments facilitate a dynamic learning ecosystem where knowledge and skills are continuously shared among family members.

**Figure 3:** Survey question 9

	How much do my children learn from me each week	How much do adults learn from the children weekly	How much do siblings learn from each other weekly	How much do children learn from person(s) outside of the immediate household weekly (online for example)	How much do adults learn from person(s) outside of the immediate household weekly (online for example)
A great deal	6	5	4	3	3
A lot	4	7	10	9	8
A moderate amount	10	7	4	10	4
A little	2	3	3	0	7
<b>Total # Responses</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>22</b>

These results underscore the value that home-educating families place on learning autonomy and flexibility. The evidence suggests that home education can effectively enhance educational capital, with reciprocal learning playing a crucial role in knowledge development. However, further research is needed to examine the factors influencing disparities in perceived capital gains among respondents.

## 6. Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing body of research on home education by highlighting the values, motivations, and experiences of home educators. The findings emphasise the importance of autonomy, diverse learning environments, and the perceived increase in educational capital. Future research should explore the psychological and pedagogical implications of these findings, particularly the role of uninterrupted and child-led learning in shaping educational outcomes, three of the young people are now studying in higher education institutions. Expanding the sample size and including young people's perspectives as they mature, could further enhance our understanding of home education's impact on lifelong learning.

As an insider-researcher, maintaining objectivity in data analysis was crucial. Future research could expand the participant pool to determine if similar trends persist across a wider range of home-educating families. That notable finding was the tendency of respondents to prioritise learning experiences that deviated from their own formal educational backgrounds. Further investigation is required to understand whether this preference is rooted in dissatisfaction with traditional schooling or a broader inclination toward self-directed learning.

Additionally, the study highlights the importance of uninterrupted and interest-driven education. A deeper psychological analysis could clarify whether parents' desire to home-educate is influenced by their own past educational experiences and how this shapes their children's learning environment.

Further examination of capital accumulation within home-educating families could provide more valuable insights. While many respondents perceived an increase in their educational capital, it remains unclear whether this growth is strictly linked to curriculum-based knowledge or extends to cultural education and social capital. Future research could explore children's perspectives on how their families' educational capital has evolved and whether they perceive an increase in knowledge exchange between generations.

These findings emphasise the need for continued research into the dynamics of home education, particularly in understanding how capital is developed, transferred, and sustained within these unique learning environments.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### **About the Author(s)**

Dr. Chelle Oldham is an experienced lecturer and researcher of education in every phase having spent two decades researching and teaching from Early Childhood through to Adult Education. Research interests include teacher education, alternative education and academic integrity.

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