

INDIVIDUAL TEACHING PHILOSOPHY OF PARENTS OF HOMESCHOOLED CHILDREN IN COMPARISON WITH PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

Dr. Ivana Rochovská, Assoc. Prof.

Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica (Slovakia)

Abstract. This study compared the individual teaching philosophies of home-educating parents and primary school teachers, with the aim of identifying preferred pedagogical perspectives and discussing their alignment with the National Curriculum framework. The sample consisted of 138 respondents: 81 primary school teachers and 57 home-educating parents from Slovakia. Respondents indicated their attitudes towards a range of pedagogical perspectives, including conservative, pragmatist, and personalist approaches. The findings indicated that teachers tended to favour a more conservative pedagogical orientation, whereas home-educating parents demonstrated a preference for a more personalist approach. Notably, no significant differences in preferences for pragmatism were observed between the two groups. These findings highlight contrasting pedagogical preferences between teachers and parents. They may indicate a potential benefit of increasing flexibility within the traditional education system, particularly in addressing the individual needs of learners, as outlined in the National Curriculum.

Keywords: home education; individual teaching approach; individual teaching philosophy; pedagogical theories; primary education

1. Introduction

Teachers as well as parents have certain opinions and beliefs about what ideal education should look like. These are mostly implicit and are formed on the basis of their experiences as a student during his/her school years. Teachers' opinions are then formed during their systematic studies at the faculty of education and later during their own teaching practice. In the case of home-educating parents, this only happens if they have a pedagogical education. These opinions and beliefs also result from how the teacher or parent perceives the development of the child's personality, i.e. whether he or she perceives personality to derive mainly from

behaviour and perceives its development through social adjustment. Or is he/she closer to the view that personality develops from within the actualisation of its existing potential. This is also reflected in the teacher's and parent's views of the child more as an object or subject of instruction and the goal of education more than formation or self-realisation. Sometimes the individual teaching philosophy may be entirely in harmony with some of the pedagogical theories.

Theoretical Starting Point of the Studied Issue

Personality development may be understood as a dynamic process shaped either by external social adaptation or internal psychological growth. Behaviourist models conceptualise personality as an epiphenomenon of observable behaviour, denying it ontological or functional status. In contrast, humanistic approaches, notably that of Rogers, posit personality as a psychological reality emerging through self-actualisation and individual meaning-making. Psychoanalytic theories, originating with Freud, propose intrapsychic mechanisms as central to personality formation, with later developments (e.g., Maslow, phenomenological theory) increasingly highlighting subjective experience and motivational structure. Intermediate models, such as those by Horney, Fromm, and Erikson, integrate both social and personal determinants, framing personality as a synthesis of relational and autonomous dimensions. For the present analysis, these theories are classified based on their relative emphasis on social versus personal factors in personality development.

Comprehensive educational theories are rooted in distinct epistemological traditions -empiricism, constructivism, and rationalism - as well as psychological foundations, including behaviourism, cognitivism, and nativism (Table 1). Educational theories differ in their conceptualisation of personality development and the aims of education. Conservative models view education as cultural transmission, where the child internalises established norms through discipline and the teacher's authority. Learning is content-driven, and assessment is based on objective standards. In contrast, interactionism, drawing on Vygotsky, emphasises development through social interaction and the internalisation of cultural tools, with a focus on the zone of proximal development. Pragmatist approaches prioritise experiential learning, where knowledge is acquired through action, and metacognitive skills are central. Personalist models frame education as the facilitation of individual growth, respecting learner autonomy and focusing on self-actualisation through non-directive methods. Assessment here is formative, comparing learners to their prior development rather than external criteria.

All those involved in any way in the education of children, including teachers and parents, inherently interpret personality development through specific theoretical lenses. Their perceived role in the educational process—alongside their view of the learner - shapes their personal teaching philosophy, which can be situated along a continuum from teacher-directed instruction to learner autonomy. This orientation, also termed an individual teaching philosophy or individual teaching approach,

reflects underlying beliefs about learning and guides classroom practice. Based on existing literature, this conceptual spectrum can be systematically modelled to capture the diversity of teaching approaches among educators. The term individual teaching philosophy is often used in the professional literature (Bowne, 2017, Dyiak et al., 2019; Fitzmaurice, Coughlan, 2007, Goodyear, Allchin, 2017; Kauffman et al., 1984, Kovacevic, 2012, Payant, 2017, Tomkuliaková, 2015). In this context, we can also talk about the individual teaching approach. While individual teaching philosophy is teachers' personal beliefs about what the purpose of education is, how it should be conducted and what is the role of teachers in the learning process, individual teaching approach is a particular way, a tendency to apply this way in teaching, i.e. methods, techniques, communication style or organisation of lessons that are based on individual philosophy. As defined by Hoque (2016), individual teaching approach comprises a coherent set of principles regarding learning translated into pedagogical action.

Table 1. Philosophical, psychological and pedagogical approaches to personality development in education (Helus, 2004; Porubský 2016; Pupala, 2001)

Epistemology tradition	Psychological foundation	Educational Theory	Characteristics
Empiricism	Behaviourism	Conservatism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– education is conceptualised as the cultural assimilation of the child;– the social environment exerts the primary formative influence on the individual's personality;– the purpose of education is the preservation and transmission of humanity's cultural heritage, with an emphasis on general education and cultivated behaviour;– the role of the teacher is to transmit knowledge and experience, while the child is expected to develop discipline and perseverance;

Constructivism	Cognitivism	Interactionism Pragmatism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – personality development is understood to arise primarily from interactions with cultural elements and with other individuals; – education is primarily concerned with the internalisation of cultural tools – such as language, symbols, and signs – which serve as mediating instruments for thought and the regulation of mental operations; – education is a necessary process for enabling individuals to live effectively; – education emphasises the integration of school with real-life contexts, focusing on the acquisition of practical competencies and life skills; – children learn most effectively through their own actions and experiences; – learners are expected not only to acquire knowledge, but more importantly, to develop the methods and means by which knowledge is obtained;
Rationalism	Nativism	Personalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – education is the stimulation of an individual’s developmental potential; – education is oriented towards fostering individuality in a manner that respects the learner’s needs and interests, ultimately supporting the individual in becoming their authentic self; – the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator, guiding the child along their learning journey; – this is typically achieved through non-directive pedagogical methods.

Literature Review

A teaching philosophy show one’s values and beliefs, theories related to teaching and learning, and it can take the form of a narrative essay. This philosophy often makes their implicit views on teaching and learning explicit. It conclude answers to questions why does an educator teach, what does he/she teach, how does he/she teach and how does he/she measure the effectiveness of teaching (Bowne, 2017). Such a conception of individual teaching philosophy is typical especially for higher educational settings (Bowne, 2017; Payant, 2017; Fitzmaurice, Coughlan, 2007). The dominant themes in Payant’s (2017) research on individual teaching philosophy were: personal beliefs about learning, description of teaching approaches, explanation of teacher roles, beliefs about teaching. Fitzmaurice and Coughlan (2007) point to different models with different structures. As a guide, they suggest that teaching philosophy statements should be about 500 to 800 words with four sections: 1. conceptualisation of teaching and learning, integration of responsibilities, relationships, and teaching and assessment methods. Payant (2017) proposed to apply the individual teaching philosophy also outside the higher educational settings.

Home education represents a distinct form of educational practice and has been legally recognised in numerous countries as an alternative to traditional, school-based instruction. In certain countries, such as Slovakia¹, the Czech Republic, and Poland, this educational form is permitted under the condition that the child undergoes compulsory assessment¹. As confirmed by research, misunderstandings between teachers responsible for compulsory assessment and home-educating parents may arise due to differing preferences for specific aspects of pedagogical approaches. Several parents reported adopting approaches, strategies and methods such as unschooling, which are consistent with pragmatist educational perspectives.

Research Issue and Research Questions

It is precisely during the abovementioned assessment process that tensions may arise between parents and primary school teachers, who are responsible for evaluating home-educated students. Divergences in perspective are particularly evident when, for instance, the teacher adheres to a more conservative educational approach, while the parent educates the child according to personalist principles. The objective of the present study was to identify which aspects of pedagogical theory are preferred by home-educating parents and by primary school teachers, to compare these preferences, and to examine their alignment with the state-endorsed educational framework². From this objective, the following research questions were derived: 1. To which aspects of pedagogical theories does the individual teaching philosophy of home-educating parents correspond? To which aspects of pedagogical theories does the individual teaching philosophy of primary school teachers correspond? Are there differences in the preferences of certain aspects between parents and teachers?

2. Research Methodology

Sample

The sample for the statistical analysis comprised 138 respondents. Of these, 81 were primary teachers and 57 were home-educating parents. The only characteristic for a respondent to be selected for the research was group membership – in the first case parents of home educated children and in the second case primary school teachers. The selection of respondents was accessible

Instruments and procedures

To explore the views of the respondents, a self-constructed questionnaire titled *Individual Teaching Philosophy (2025)* was used. Completed by home-educating parents and primary school teachers in 2025, the questionnaire comprised two items. In the first item, respondents expressed the extent to which they identified with aspects of different pedagogical approaches, ranging from behavioural and conservative to pragmatic, constructivist, and personalistic, humanistic approaches. The respondents were asked to indicate their level of identification with statements such as „The role of education should be, above all, to preserve the cultural

values of mankind, to strengthen respect for traditions”, “Education is mainly about linking the content of education to everyday life situations”, “Education should be oriented towards the individual development of each student’s personality”, “The teacher’s role is to impart as much knowledge and experience as possible to the students”. All statements are listed in the electronic link in the References section under *Questionnaire: Individual Teaching Philosophy* (2025). In the second item, respondents were asked to select the three statements from the ones listed above that they considered the most significant. Since home-educating parents are a specific group of respondents, they were asked an extra question. They were asked to write their opinions related to the issue (open-ended questions).

Data Analysis

In the first item, for each response of “completely agree,” 4 points were assigned, for “mostly agree,” 3 points, for “mostly disagree,” 2 points, and for “completely disagree,” 1 point. No points were assigned for missing responses. In the second item, for each marked statement, 3 extra points were assigned. In the pre-set Excel sheet¹, a combination of three values corresponding to the preference for aspects of various pedagogical conceptions was calculated for each respondent.

Data analysis involved the application of descriptive statistics, including absolute and relative frequencies, mean values, median values, mode values, standard deviation, maximum and minimum. The t-test for independent samples (Welch’s version) was used to test for statistical differences between groups.

A qualitative methodology was employed to interpret home-educating parents’ additional remarks from the open-ended question. These responses were analysed through open coding and structured within an analytical narrative framework to address the research questions.

3. Research Results

Home-educating parents prefer personalism the most, followed by pragmatism and conservatism the least (Table 2). Teachers prefer pragmatism and personalism about equally, but are significantly more conservative than parents (Table 3).

The t-test for independent samples (with correction for unequal variances – Welch’s t-test) was used to analyse differences between these independent groups (Table 4). The level of statistical significance was set at $\alpha = .05$.

Table 2. Preferences of views of pedagogical theories in home-educating parents

Preference of views	Views of conservatism		Views of pragmatism		Views of personalism	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Average	13.58	46.82	21.54	74.29	23.09	79.61
Median	13.00	44.83	21.00	72.41	23.00	79.31
Mode	12.00	41.38	23.00	79.31	23.00	79.31
Standard deviation	3.14	10.83	3.41	11.77	2.97	10.25
Max	21.00	72.41	29.00	100,00	29.00	100.00
Min	5.00	17.24	15.00	51.72	17.00	58.62

Table 3. Preferences of views of pedagogical theories in primary school teachers

Preference of views	Views of conservatism		Views of pragmatism		Views of personalism	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Average	17.70	61.05	21.98	75.78	21.77	75.05
Median	18.00	62.07	22.00	75.86	22.00	75.86
Mode	16.00	55.17	23.00	79.31	23.00	79.31
Standard deviation	3.77	13.00	3.01	10.37	3.24	11.16
Max	26.00	89.66	28.00	96.55	29.00	100.00
Min	9.00	31.03	14.00	48.28	14.00	48.28

Table 4. Comparison of parents' and teachers' preferences for aspects of pedagogical theories

Pedagogical Theory	Result	p-value
Conservatism	A significant difference (teachers > parents)	< 0.000001
Pragmatism	No significant difference	0.435
Personalism	A significant difference (parents > teachers)	0.015

There was a statistically significant difference in preference for conservatism between the groups. Primary teachers showed higher mean scores (M = 17.70, SD = 3.77) compared to home-educating parents (M = 13.58, SD = 3.14). The test result showed that the difference was highly statistically significant, $t(122.68) = -6.98, p < .001$. This difference indicates a stronger embeddedness of teachers in traditional, more authoritarian forms of pedagogy.

In the case of pragmatism, there was no statistically significant difference between the groups. The mean score of parents was $M = 21.54$ ($SD = 3.41$), while the mean score of teachers was $M = 21.98$ ($SD = 3.01$). The result of $t(115.94) = -0.78$, $p = .435$, shows that pragmatism is perceived quite similarly by both groups, as a balanced and practical approach to teaching.

The difference between the groups was also statistically significant for personalism. Parents scored higher on average ($M = 23.09$, $SD = 2.97$) than teachers ($M = 21.77$, $SD = 3.24$). The t-test results confirm the statistical significance of the difference, $t(123.24) = 2.48$, $p = .015$. Thus, parents show a greater preference for an individualised approach taking into account the child’s personality and needs.

In the section for the home-educating parents the space for their opinions and recommendations was added. The home-educating parents reported a variety of opinions regarding pedagogical theories. In terms of conservatism, they stated that in schools where there are high class sizes, the teacher has no chance to apply other than a conservative approach. In terms of pragmatism, they recommended authentic assessment and the development of social skills. In terms of personalism, the importance of a stimulating environment in education were cited, as well as good experiences with self-directed learning. Within these views it was also noted that each student may suit a different approach (Table 5).

Table 5. The views of home-educating parents in relation to preference perspectives of pedagogical theories

Inclination towards the pedagogical theory	Codes	Views of respondents (examples)
Conservatism	Dependence of the applied concept on the number of students in the class	‘...I see a big difference between a teacher in a school in Slovak conditions = many children per teacher.’
		‘I see the need for a more directive form of teaching at school than at home...’
		‘Most ideal learning scenarios are inapplicable with large numbers of students per teacher, plus the obligation to meet the curriculum.’
	Assessment	‘...it is important to distinguish when objective assessment makes sense (e.g. when we want to give a child information, ... e.g. when preparing for an entrance exam, ...when interviewing for a job) and when, on the contrary, it makes sense to evaluate his/her progress.’

Pragmatism	Assessment	'...children's work should have a practical application in their lives, so that it is meaningful to them and they are motivated to do it. Assignments for purely academic purposes with the aim of archiving in a student's portfolio tend to have a demotivating effect.'
	Social skills	'More important than academic knowledge nowadays are social skills, which have been neglected for generations and suppressed by the school system.'
Personalism	The importance of a stimulating environment	'A stimulating environment should include opportunities to encounter as many aspects of life as possible in a practical way that engages the child.'
	Preference for self-directed education	'I would welcome the opportunity for parents to choose from a range of educational concepts, including self-directed learning.'
		'I see the great effectiveness of self-directed learning in our children.'
Others	Diversity of learning styles in children	'...in my experience, something different suits each child (even for different subjects).'
		'I have kids who want to read encyclopedias or educational videos at home, they enjoy it tremendously and remember it incredibly, they experience.... and they don't enjoy doing projects or experiments.'

Discussion

The findings suggest that there are significant differences between home-educating parents and primary school teachers in their pedagogical orientation. Teachers tend to take a more conservative approach, which may be a consequence of their formal training and experience in institutional settings. Conversely, home-educating parents prefer more personalised forms of education, which allow for a greater degree of freedom, respect for the child's individuality and flexibility in methods. The absence of a difference in pragmatism may indicate that both groups recognise the importance of practical orientation and adaptation of teaching to specific situations and needs. These results highlight the importance of a diversity of pedagogical approaches and the potential for enriching the formal education system with more personalised and flexible elements typical of home education.

For several decades, the Slovak educational system was predominantly shaped by a conservative approach. This has led many parents – particularly those who favour the individual development of the child and the nurturing of personal interests – to seek home education as an alternative¹. Although reform initiatives launched since the early 21st century have aimed to shift towards learner-centred and personality-oriented education, these efforts have

often been met with scepticism among teachers (Porubský et al., 2016). The most recent reform likewise reflects a primarily pragmatist orientation².

The unexpected findings indicating no difference between parents and teachers in their preference for pragmatism raise the question of why teachers are generally perceived as conservative, given that many expressed a preference for aspects of both pragmatist and personalist approaches. It is important to consider the contextual conditions under which teachers operate, including large class sizes, which often make it difficult to translate their individual teaching philosophy into their actual teaching practice.

The limitations of the study primarily concern the sample size and the accessibility of respondents. In the context of home education, data collection poses particular challenges, as no official registry of homeschooling families exists. Moreover, the research focus may be perceived by some parents as aligned with the traditional school system, which can lead to reduced willingness to participate in the survey.

Conclusions

The results of this research confirm that the individual teaching philosophies of home-educating parents and elementary school teachers differ significantly. Parents prefer a more personalised approach that is more flexible and more respectful of the child's individuality, while teachers show a tendency towards more conservative, authoritarian forms of teaching, which may be a consequence of their formal teacher training and experience in institutional settings. The absence of a statistically significant difference in preference for pragmatism suggests that both groups recognise the importance of a practical approach and tailoring teaching to the specific needs of students. This research highlights the value of diverse pedagogical approaches and the potential to enrich the formal education system with the more flexible and personalised elements that are characteristic of home education. By harnessing a variety of pedagogical approaches, we can provide an education that is better suited to the individual needs and interests of students, which is also a requirement of the new national curriculum².

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NOTES

1. Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on Education.
2. Ministry of education, science, research and sport of the Slovak Republic (2023). State Educational Programme for Primary Education. National Institute of Education and Youth.
3. Questionnaire: Individual Teaching Philosophy. 2025. Available at: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1H_VUil4PcB1NbcCeRWXex8mGHR_KIJVU0IxnwAR82tM/preview

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✉ **Dr. Ivana Rochovská, Assoc. Prof.**

ORCID iD: 0000-0001-9346-7993

WoS Researcher ID: JZU-0652-2024

Matej Bel University

Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

E-mail: ivana.rochovska@umb.sk