

The Phenomenon of Homeschooling in Lebanon

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to explore the reality of homeschooling in Lebanon from the perspective of homeschooling parents and stakeholders in the educational sector. It is a qualitative-phenomenological study. The research relied on existing theories in homeschooling as a main theoretical framework. The study's participants were ten parents and three prominent public sector education experts. Triangulation of source was used in data collection tools: semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and analysis of documents. Following data analysis using an inductive method, results were categorized under two main outcomes; the first being to identify the reality of homeschooling in Lebanon and how it is conducted by parents, and the second being to examine the approach to homeschooling taken by those in the educational sector. For the first outcome, the following results were found: (1) 7 guidelines that parents should pay attention to in order to practice homeschooling. (2) 4 Reasons for homeschooling (academic, financial...). (3) 30 internal and external advantages and challenges of homeschooling. (4) The dominance of a selective combination from different sources of the Lebanese curriculum in homeschooling among 4 curricula. (5) The depth of the child's positive interaction in homeschooling. (6) Very good academic results were achieved by participants' children. (7) The cautious attitudes of partners towards homeschooling. As for the second objective, data resulting from the interviews conducted with the stakeholders were categorized into four main themes, namely: (1) Lack of legislation for homeschooling in Lebanon. (2) Lack of studies or reports on homeschooling in Lebanon. (3) Disparity between stakeholders' readings and evaluations of homeschooling. (4) Explanation and proposal for immediate and structural mechanisms towards legislating homeschooling in Lebanon.

Keywords: Homeschooling, Schooling, Education, Lebanon, Parents

1. Introduction

Learning is a process by which we acquire knowledge daily, as any individual can acquire knowledge automatically through interactions with others, through surroundings, or their occupation. Despite being simple, defining the learning process scientifically remains contentious, as it is rare to have scientists agree on a unified definition. What can be said, however, is that learning, in its essence, refers to a series of intended positive changes in human behavior through the process of transferring information, skills, and knowledge in diverse ways (Victoria, 2018).

Historically, teaching used to be conducted by parents or by the church until the sixteenth century, when literacy became a major issue. Since then, the education process was gradually handed over to the government since only the government was able to make the education process mandatory (Glenn, 2011).

Today, after many years of compulsory education, it is estimated that 95% of countries in the world apply obligatory education laws that target children whose ages range between four and thirteen years, and this varies by country (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015).

As a result, the concept of learning has been associated with the school space as a geographical location for executing the learning process, as it is currently the first undisputed place to practice teaching by teachers. Subsequently, the school became an official social institution that performed several functions and tasks, the most important of which was the function of teaching, transferring culture and education, and creating an appropriate environment for mental, physical, emotional, and social development (Boalian, 2009).

Despite all that the schools can offer in terms of a safe environment and support in the educational process, there is still a significant number of parents who are increasingly looking for homeschooling for their children. In fact, the number of students studying at home increased from 850,000 (1.7% of students) to 1,690,000 (3.3% of students) between 1999 to 2016 in the United States of America (USA) only (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). According to a Gallup poll, over half of the respondents (53%) answered “yes” when asked, "Should parents have the legal right to homeschool their children?", reflecting the broad acceptance of people towards the idea of homeschooling.

2. Literature review

In order to understand parents' motivations for homeschooling, many studies have been conducted, including Collom's study, which summarizes three broad reasons for moving towards homeschooling in the USA, namely: (1) dissatisfaction with public schools (because of their educational policies and curricula); (2) academic and educational concerns, which refers to the presence of matters that occupy students' minds and for which they compete in school (such as famous brands); (3) religious or moral values, which refers to the presence of a trend pushing towards secularism, leading to the loss of religious and moral values among

students (Collom, 2005). In another study of homeschooling motivations, seven factors were identified: academic and curricular topics, safety concerns, social issues, comfort concerns, health and disability concerns, and values concerns (Herzel, 1997).

In Britain, studies indicate that the trend towards homeschooling is due to two reasons:

1- The opposition of Evangelical Christians to public education for reasons such as the teaching of Darwin's theory of evolution. However, religion is not the main reason of opposition, as Dr. Paula Rothermel - a British educational psychologist specializing in homeschooling - confirms that religion does not represent a strong motive for homeschooling in Britain, as only about 4% of the 412 families that adopt homeschooling in Britain and included in the study considered that religion was a motivation for this choice (Koons, 2010).

- The fear of some sociologists, psychologists, and educational institutions, including Ivan Illich, John Holt, and Raymond of the negative effects and consequences of school education on the mental and emotional development of the child (Gaither, 2017).

Then again, it is not yet possible to assess the impact of homeschooling on students, whether at the academic or social level, compared to in-school education. Yet, a study by Murphy found two basic opinions regarding the academic outcomes of school students based on a review of hundreds of studies on this topic: the first is that homeschooling is a neutral factor in academic results, while the other is that homeschooling provides academic benefits to students (Murphy, 2012).

In spite of the controversy about homeschooling's effectiveness, many parents rely on international rights to conduct homeschooling after being confronted with legal issues in their own countries (America and Britain in the past, and Germany today), such as Article 26, Part 3 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." Article 2 of the 1950 Protocol to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms states that "In the exercise of any function which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions."

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also states in Article 13 that "The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents [...] to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities" but in a manner "conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State" (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 1966).

Rather than remain confined to a few countries, this experience has spread throughout the world through the Internet since 1999 in countries (Australia, Canada, France, Hungary, Japan...) that have explicitly or implicitly recognized the right of the family to decide how their children are taught (Ray, 2016).

After thoroughly reviewing the literature, seven important topics for homeschooling were identified: (1) Curricula and policies adopted in home education. (2) Socialization which

includes the development of social skills as well as the formation of broader values. (3) The transition of homeschooled children to higher education. (4) The study of the lives of homeschooled students after their completion of education. (5) Studies related to demographic conditions, including the reasons for homeschooling. (6) Studies related to the assessment of academic achievement. (7) Studies related to the law regarding homeschooling. This article will examine the last four titles, especially in Lebanon.

The Arab world lacks official studies that address the reality of homeschooling and how to benefit from it. Furthermore, as far as legislation is concerned, most Arab countries, if not all of them, do not have laws allowing homeschooling and are still ignoring the issue, and this can be verified by reviewing the websites of the ministries of education.

In Lebanon, there is no law regulating homeschooling, and those who practice it cannot receive an officially recognized certificate. Lebanon has no law granting exceptions to education methods for persons with special needs or disabilities (Zalzali, 2020).

3. The current reality and the issue

The educational system in Lebanon began to form at the beginning of the eighteenth century, especially after the Louaize Council in 1736, which was the first conference to call for compulsory and free education for all children in Lebanon. Following this council, a significant number of schools were gradually established.

The structure of education was primarily organized under the French mandate including institutions, central administration, and curricula. After Lebanon gained independence, the Lebanese government continued to work on developing curricula and improving programs, although in a faltering manner, as in 1968 and 1997. The curriculum of 1997 is the one still effective in the various types and levels of education available in the country, whether in general education or vocational and technical education (Lebanese Educational Center Research and Development, 2004).

The public education system in Lebanon consists of two stages (Zalzali, 2020):

- The elementary stage includes the first nine years of schooling, known as the primary and intermediate years, which are compulsory years for all Lebanese. After completing it, students receive the "Official Intermediate Certificate".
- The secondary stage refers to the three years following the elementary stage. During the second year of this stage, students choose between the scientific and literary tracks. In the third year, the student chooses between one of the four tracks: Arts and Humanities; General Sciences; Life Sciences; and Economics and Sociology, at the end of which the student receives the "Official Secondary Certificate" after passing official exams conducted by the Ministry of Education.

The Lebanese educational system is characterized by including private and public sectors as stipulated in the Lebanese Constitution and its articles, especially Article 10. This has resulted in a large extent in two major sectors of education: the private sector represented by private

educational institutions whose roots go back centuries, and the public sector represented by public educational institutions, and its spread began before the independence in 1943 under various types, branches, and levels of education. The availability of different sectors has a positive impact on enriching the educational experience in Lebanon in terms of parents' choice of how their children learn, whether through public educational institutions or through private educational institutions. Nevertheless, this does not seem to be enough for parents, as there are still some of them who are opting for homeschooling, although it is not legalized in Lebanon (Lebanese Educational Center for Research and Development, 2004).

Considering this, the purpose of this research emerges, which is to explore the experience of homeschooling in Lebanon and to understand its causes and how it is taking place.

This research addresses the following sub-questions:

- 1- How is the homeschooling process carried out in Lebanon from the parents' points of view?
- 2- What are its underlying causes?
- 3- How do three stakeholders in the educational sector of Lebanon perceive home education and the possibility of its legalization?

4. Relevance of the topic

The relevance of this study stems from the following points from the perspective of the researcher:

- It sheds light on a hidden aspect of the educational reality in Lebanon-homeschooling-, through a scientific transfer of available experiences and their results, as there are no reports or information about it.
- It contributes to finding solutions for educational problems, especially during current exceptional circumstances around the globe due to the pandemic, and in Lebanon, in particular, due to current crises (electricity, transportation, fuel, pandemic).
- It enriches the educational experience in Lebanon and the Arab world since this research can be considered as a first step for the initiation of research about homeschooling in the Arab world in general and Lebanon in particular. It provides a primary source of material for future studies on this topic.
- It aims at motivating the government officials to proceed in the establishment of laws and decrees that regulate homeschooling in Lebanon.

5. Method

To achieve the objectives of the research, the qualitative phenomenological design and its interpretive paradigm were adopted since they can capture the complexities of the phenomenon under study as many factors cannot be controlled due to interaction with humans (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

6. Research population and participants

The study's population includes all those who practice homeschooling in Lebanon and do not hold the nationality of another country which would grant them the right to practice homeschooling. Since there is no clear information or data about the study's population in Lebanon, purposeful sampling was deployed. Hence, participants were selected according to certain specifications that were set by the researcher. As such, participants were reached through informal means such as private social media groups and the snowball method. Eventually, ten parents who were homeschooling their kids agreed to take part in the study (Table 1), and three education experts of high official positions were interviewed too.

Table 1: Main characteristics of homeschooling participants in Lebanon*

Family	Teaching responsible	Parents occupation status	Teacher educational degree	Number of homeschooled children	Sex of homeschooled student	Education stage	Homeschooling period (years)
1	Mother, Teacher	Employed mother	Bachelor, Masters	1	Male	Elementary	4
2	Mother, Father	Both are employed	PhD	3	Male	Elementary	2
					Male	Pre-school	3
					Female	Elementary	2
3	Mother	Unemployed	Bachelor	2	Male	Pre-school	3
					Female	Pre-school	3
4	Mother	Unemployed	Bachelor	1	Male	Pre-school	3
5	Mother	Unemployed	Bachelor	3	Male	Pre-school, elementary & secondary	12
					Male	Pre-school & elementary	5
					Female	Pre-school, elementary & secondary	12
6	Mother	Unemployed	Bachelor	1	Male	Pre-school	3
7	Mother	Unemployed	Bachelor	1	Male	Elementary	5
8	Mother	Unemployed	Bachelor	2	Male	Pre-school	3
					female	Pre-school	3
9	Mother	Employed	PhD	3	Male	Pre-school, elementary & secondary	12
					Female	Pre-school & elementary	9
					Male	Pre-school & elementary	6
10	Mother, Father	Both are employed	Masters	2	Male	Elementary	4
					Female	Elementary & secondary	4

*Most of the parents were familiar with homeschooling and had attended workshops, seminars, or dialogues regarding education. It is noteworthy that many of them used to earn high grades while studying as auto declared. The financial condition of the families ranged from poor to average (as reflected in the area of residence, furniture, car, etc).

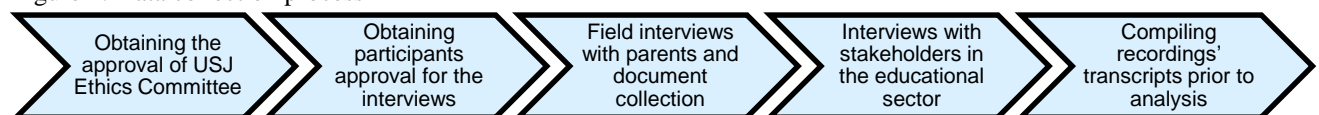
7. Study Tools

Triangulation of sources was used to collect data to provide a more robust picture and increase the level of confidence in the results (Tashakkori & Teddle, 2003). Three tools were used: (1) semi-structured interviews with parents and stakeholders in the educational sector, (2) focus groups, (3) document analysis.

8. Data collection mechanism

An authorization letter to participate in the study was sent to all participants after the approval of the Ethics Committee of Saint Joseph University of Beirut. Next, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with parents, while collecting the relevant documentation. The education experts were interviewed afterwards. Except for one interview, all the interviews were recorded and transcribed for data analysis. The process is illustrated in (Figure 1).

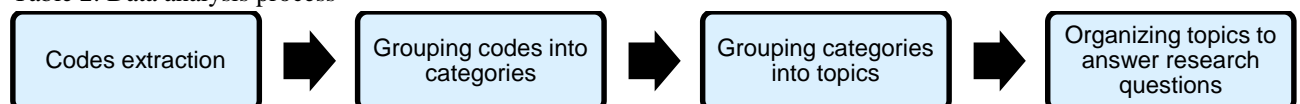
Figure 1: Data collection process



9. Data Analysis

Data were interpreted - not analyzed - according to the inductive mode by extracting codes from the interviews, and then grouping them into categories, and finally into different subjects that answered the research questions (Figure 2).

Table 2: Data analysis process



10. Results

In this study, the first and second goals were to discover the reality of homeschooling in Lebanon and its reasons. After the analysis of the results, the following seven main themes emerged: (1) Parents should consider seven points practice homeschooling: their ability to teach in terms of time; their ability to teach in terms of personal and educational skills; their personal traits (patience, steadfastness, ..); prior knowledge of homeschooling; children being in elementary or secondary level; both parents' agreement on teaching method; finally, the availability of teaching means and resources required for homeschooling. (2) There are four different reasons for practicing homeschooling amongst participants: health (Covid-19 pandemic...), financial, religious, and academic reasons. (3) There are advantages and challenges of homeschooling, classified as internal or external factors as found in Table 2. (4) The parents mainly rely on a purposeful selection from the Lebanese curriculum in

homeschooling out of the four other available curricula which are (a) Lebanese curriculum – 2 participants, (b) Purposeful selection from different sources of the Lebanese curriculum – 6 participants, (c) Combination of Lebanese curriculum with another non-Lebanese curriculum – 1 participant, (d) No specific curriculum – 1 participant. (5) There is a positive interaction outcome between the child and his parents because of the connection that develops at home. (6) The homeschooled children are mainly obtaining very good academic results. (7) It was highlighted that homeschooling decisions have to be endorsed by both parents or else problems may arise if one of the parents is skeptic about the process.

The third objective was to examine the stance of the three experienced stakeholders in Lebanon towards homeschooling. They mainly agreed that: there is no legislation regarding homeschooling in Lebanon apart from some exceptions; there is a lack of studies or reports addressing homeschooling; but there was a disparity between stakeholders' perceptions of homeschooling, and they proposed temporary and quick solutions for the legislation of homeschooling in Lebanon.

Table 2: Advantage and challenges of homeschooling

Homeschooling Advantage		Homeschooling challenges	
Internal factors	External factors	Internal challenges	External challenges
Passion for learning and discovery (10*)	No lifestyle restrictions in terms of eating, dressing, and school transportation (6*)	Pressure at home (2*)	Lack of Arabic teaching resources (8*)
Strengthening the relationship between parents and children, which enhances emotional satisfaction (8*)	Benefiting of nature (5*)	Creates problems between the child and the parents (1*)	Lack of social activities (7*)
Paying attention to children and their energies, by speeding up sometimes and slowing down at other times (8*)	Acquiring skills and techniques usually not acquired in schools (7*)	Lack of discipline (2*)	Difference in children's aptitudes, skills, and predisposition to learn (1*)
Freedom in most of the choices (5*)	No negative pressure due to competition (5*)	Children are passively comfortable with their parents while at school they are not (3*)	The inexistence of a curriculum specific to homeschooling (7*)
Knowing the child's personality and desires (6*)		Social isolation (3*)	Social pressure (4*)
No homework (7*)		Requires more efforts from the parents compared to regular school (6*)	Justification of illogical adopted method (1*)
A unique, rich, and beautiful experience (10*)		Requires a lot of time for preparation and follow up (7*)	

Turning the lesson into a fun game (4*)		Present the information in an attractive and interesting way (3*)	
Learning stems from a problem and a need (5*)		No social life for the parents (4*)	
Self-learning and self-management of their lives (2*)			

* The values in brackets refer to the number of participants having raised these points.

11. Discussion

Prior to diving into discussing the study's results, some important considerations should be taken into account for interpretation. First, studies about the topic have previously been conducted outside Lebanon and the Arab world; however, most of them were quantitative studies. While the results differed in some cases between the three sources of data, the three techniques used in the present qualitative study corroborated the results (reasons for homeschooling, curriculum, laws, etc.).

As for the first and second research questions "How does the homeschooling process take place in Lebanon from the parents' points of view? And what are its causes?" several points were outlined. Guidelines for homeschooling suggested by participants in this study is a topic not covered by previous studies, yet the comparison of demographic characteristics with Kunzmann & Gaither (2013), Rain (2017) and Ray (2010) led to some common characteristics such as homeschooled students age, ongoing marriage (no divorce), among others. As for the underlying reasons behind homeschooling, this study confirms the results of Montes (2016) regarding the four reasons leading to homeschooling mentioned earlier in Results section, and is it very close to those of Redford et al. (2012) in terms of religious and academic reasons but it differs substantially from Ray's (2015) results thoroughly. In contrast to other studies such as Rain (2017); Kunzmann & Gaither (2013); Kunzmann, (2016); Redford et al. (2012); Montes (2016); Ray (2015), the current study describes in detail how parents deal with their homeschooled children. Although the current study differed from previous studies in determining the most widespread curriculum, it agreed on the kinds of curriculum used. This research stands out because it covers both the actual program (the number of days or hours and when it takes place, in addition to the time spent in teaching) and how it is communicated and explained. Since the current study is qualitative, it enabled participants to describe the interaction of their children with homeschooling, unlike Hanna (2012), Redford et al. (2012), Montes (2016), Zhao & Badzis (2014) and Ray (2015) that had never approached this aspect. Also, the current study relied on the results of exams that were conducted by the schools, parents, or official exams, in contrast to Barwegen et al. (2004), Rudner (1999), Ray (2015) and Richard & Robin (2000) studies which took place in the United States and Martin et al. (2011) study that took place in Canada, and finally Baig's study (2018) conducted in India, which were designed similarly to cohort studies. The participating partners also talked about how they received the idea and interacted with it during its application, unlike other studies

like Rain (2017), Kunzman & Gaither (2013), Kunzman (2016), Redford et al (2012), Montes (2016), Ray (2015) and Rudner (1999) which didn't mention the issue.

Regarding the topics of the third research question “How do stakeholders in the educational sector in Lebanon approach homeschooling?”, it is noteworthy to mention that the legal status of homeschooling in Lebanon is similar to the situation in other Arab countries and non-Arab ones like Brazil, and it differs from other countries like the USA and most European countries for instance. Indeed, the current study emphasized the difficulty of having official studies or reports on homeschooling in Lebanon or in the Arab world similar to Wierzejski & Boratyńska’s (2018, p. 36) study, unlike in many other countries. In this study, the opinion of stakeholders in the educational sector was discussed in-depth with the participants. In contrast, this was not the case in other studies like Cavan (2017), Ray (2017) and Wierzejski & Boratyńska (2018). Several differences emerged between what some of the stakeholders indicated in their understanding of homeschooling and what the participating parents reported (in terms of details and generalities). According to the above-mentioned studies, homeschooling deprives the student of multiple life experiences and practical training, although examples of these experiences were not given. Ray (2015), Barwegen et al. (2004), Rudner (1999) and Richard & Robin, (2000) emphasized that education offers an integrated system of required competencies, since there is much more to homeschooling than just studying at home, but also includes extracurriculars, trips, scouting activities, as emphasized by the current study’s participants.

12. Conclusion

Although the qualitative methodology is used in this study as it was indicated - that is, its results are not generalized -, its importance lies in understanding the educational model of the topic (homeschooling) and its approach, whether in order to find solutions to the problems and challenges posed by the participants or to establish it theoretically for later adoption. In addition, the research examined both the academic and procedural realities of homeschooling, as well as the opinions of stakeholders in the educational sector. In Lebanon, homeschooling is neither regulated nor organized, which makes it difficult to contact participants and obtain their information, in addition to the unstable circumstances due to economic collapse which impacts all life affairs (no electricity, no fuel...). Indeed, it was also difficult to find Arabic sources on homeschooling.

In light of the findings from this study and those in the scientific literature, the following recommendations for future homeschooling studies, were developed:

- Developing dynamic curricula tailored to homeschoolers.
- Include homeschoolers in the Arab world in the study.
- Examining the utilized curricula and programs in depth.

- Creating clear mechanisms for homeschooling similar to those used abroad.
- Conducting a quantitative study on homeschoolers with the Ministry's prior confirmation that no harm will be caused to them.
- Including the social dimensions of homeschoolers in the study
- Conducting a quantitative study similar to the current study to compare results.
- Conducting a quantitative study to find out the effects of homeschooling on students' motivation to learn.

The findings of this study contribute to enriching the educational sector in Lebanon considering that it focuses for the first time on homeschooling in Lebanon through the qualitative data that it has provided.

It was highlighted during this study that lasted nearly a year that homeschooling is a valuable and rich educational experience; yet it is quite relative. In fact, homeschooling can be appropriate to some families more than others, depending on general living conditions.

In the hope that this paper will contribute in the Arab world to the launch of legislation and research in home education on the one hand, and to have more faith in qualitative research on the other hand, since it is closer to the eastern environment, full of intangible moral dimensions that are difficult to detect only through homeliness and observation.

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