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Ari Neuman

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Ask the Young: What Homeschooled Adolescents Think About Homeschooling

Ari Neuman 

Western Galilee College, Acre, Israel

ABSTRACT

Home schooling is a growing practice in many Western countries. Examination of the practice has entailed collection of “hard” data, such as academic achievements and success rates in higher education, as well as investigation of the practice from the perspective of parents. It is very important to examine homeschooling from the perspective of the children studying in this framework, yet only a few studies of this type have been conducted. The purpose of the present research was to examine how adolescents evaluate homeschooling. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 19 young people (ages 16–22) who were raised in a homeschooling setting. The interviews included a series of questions intended to examine how adolescents evaluate homeschooling. The findings indicated diverse themes that can be divided into four main super-themes: contents and methods of instruction and learning; outcomes – traits; outcomes – family; and outcomes – society. Regarding the first super-theme, the interviewees noted both advantages and disadvantages. For the second and third themes, they cited only advantages. With regard to the fourth theme, only disadvantages were mentioned. The findings suggest that some of the themes refer to constructivist learning and some of them reflect overall aims of education – socialization and individuation.

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Recent decades have seen steady development of a special and interesting educational and social practice: parents in many Western countries are opting not to send their children to the public or private school systems, choosing instead to educate them at home. Several terms are used in order to refer to this practice, such as homeschooling, home education, and unschooling. Each term emphasizes a different aspect of the practice: homeschooling refers to studying that takes place at home; home education accentuates not only learning subjects and disciplines, but also a comprehensive educational process; and unschooling emphasizes opposition to some of the underlying principles of school education.

Furthermore, it is customary to divide homeschooling practices into different types, according to their degree of structure. Structured homeschooling follows a detailed, clear curriculum. In unstructured homeschooling (or unschooling), by contrast, there is no curriculum at all (Aurini & Davies, 2005; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Ray, 2010; Rothermel, 2011). Of course, there are many different models in between these two poles. Actually, the degree of structure in homeschooling should be seen as a continuum. In addition, the degree of structure in homeschooling can be divided into two dimensions: the degree of structure in the process and the degree of structure in the content. These are independent dimensions, and each can be studied separately to obtain a more accurate characterization of structure in homeschooling (Neuman & Guterman, 2016c).

Whether structured, unstructured, or a mixture of the two, homeschooling is growing in the Western world. The development of this practice is expressed in two main respects. First, the

number of children who are homeschooled has been increasing steadily in several countries. In the United States, estimates vary, from a conservative figure of 2 million children (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013) to larger numbers cited by others (Ray, 2019). It is interesting that in the 1970s, the estimated number of homeschooled children in the United States was only 13,000; thus, the growth has been very significant. According to Blok and Karsten (2011), the number of children who are home educated in England is estimated at about 80,000. In addition to the growth in numbers, the legitimacy of homeschooling has also increased worldwide. For example, homeschooling is now legal in all states of the United States, as well as in England and other European countries (Monk, 2009; Petrie, 1995; Waddell, 2010).

In Israel, the decisive majority of children attends preschools and schools. In 2018, the education system in the country included over 1,700,000 students from elementary to high school. They were enrolled in nearly 5,000 education institutions. At that time, the average class size in Israel was 27.3 students. Over half a million children attended preschools (Ministry of Education, 2019).

Until a few years ago, homeschooling was legal in Israel only under special exemption from the Mandatory Education Law, issued by the education ministry. Today homeschooling is allowed in Israel by a circular of the director general of the education ministry, and there is an organized mechanism of permission and supervision. Parents who are interested in educating their children at home must submit a request to the Supervision Unit of the Ministry of Education, which discusses such applications and issues permits to homeschool. Permission is given for a renewable period of one to two years. It is granted to parents who present a well-formed worldview that precludes school education and proves that the child is receiving acceptable systematic education in the home.

As in other countries, there has also been a growth in the scope of the practice in Israel in recent decades, from a few dozen cases at the end of the 20th century to about 140 in 2004, and approximately 450 in 2014 (Knesset Research and Information Center, 2014); today, the figure is apparently close to 800.

Alongside the increase in numbers and legitimation, scholarly interest in homeschooling has been increasing and numerous studies of the practice have been conducted in recent decades. The literature includes examination of various aspects of homeschooling, among them the reasons that parents choose to homeschool their children (Aurini & Davies, 2005; Neuman & Guterman, 2017; Beck, 2017; Boschee & Boschee, 2011; Brabant, Bourdon, & Jutras, 2003; Gaither, 2009; Mayberry, 1989; Rothermel, 2003) and methods, or how homeschooling is carried out in practice (Anthony & Burroughs, 2012; Hanna, 2012; Patterson et al., 2007; Sherfinski, 2014; Thomas, 2016; Van Galen, 1988).

Academic achievements of children who are homeschooled is of interest to researchers of homeschooling, in its own right and in comparison with children who attend school (Barwegen, Falciani, Putnam, Reamer, & Stair, 2004; Boulter, 2017; Ray, 2010; Rudner, 1999). The research findings regarding learning outcomes in relation to homeschooling are mixed. Some studies have indicated an advantage in favor of homeschooled children over their peers who attend school, but the others have not.

Against this background, Kunzman and Gaither (2013) found many deficiencies in the research methods of different studies of the learning outcomes of homeschooled children. One explanation of the disagreement among researchers is suggested by the findings of Martin-Chang, Gould, and Meuse (2011), which showed that children who learn in structured homeschooling had better outcomes compared with their peers in school, but children educated in the framework of unschooling had lower outcomes than those who attended school. Another explanation of the differing results might be the notion that the learning outcomes of children depend on the teaching goals of their educators. According to this argument, it is only useful to compare the achievements of homeschooled and school-going children when the education system and homeschooling parents have similar teaching goals (Neuman & Guterman, 2016a).

In most cases, the decision to homeschool is made by the parents, and not children. Accordingly, much of the research has examined the practice of homeschooling from the perspective of parents, seeking to understand how they perceive homeschooling, why they opt for it, how they implement

homeschooling in practice, and how they evaluate it (Arai, 2000; Bielick, Chandler, & Broughman, 2002; Cai, Reeve, & Robinson, 2002; Collom, 2005; Foster, Froyen, Skibbe, Bowles, & Decker, 2016; Hanna, 2012; Knowles, 1991; Litcher & Schmidt, 1991; Mayberry & Knowles, 1989; McGraw, Bergen, & Schumm, 1993; Van Galen, 1987).

The examination of homeschooling has involved the collection of “hard” data, such as academic achievements, rates of success in higher education, and the like, as well as studies of the practice from the perspective of parents. However, it is very important to examine homeschooling from the perspective of the children who learn in this framework, since the choice is usually made by the parents but has significant implications for the children. A small number of studies have been published on homeschooling from the children’s point of view (Jackson, 2007; Jones, 2013), but most of the research still focuses on the parents’ perspective and there is a shortage of knowledge regarding the children’s perceptions.

As in other countries, in Israel, homeschooling is a rapidly growing phenomenon. Thus, a better understanding is important to give decision-makers, as well as parents, reliable data to make informed decisions, as well as develop policies.

It is particularly important to understand the practice of homeschooling against the theoretical background of the postmodern period. Several researchers have presented views of the changes in education systems and educational institutions as reflecting broader social perspectives. These approaches indicate a new era in human social history – the postmodern area, which has been accompanied by far-reaching changes in many spheres of life, including worldviews and ideologies (Aviram, 2010; Boyne & Rattansi, 2017; Dickens & Fontana, 2015; Wight, 2018). These, in turn, have led to a loss of trust in the existence of a singular truth or definitive, eternal knowledge. The social structure has also changed dramatically. The traditional family has weakened and the importance of family in the life of the individual has waned. In addition, the rigid divisions by gender and between children and adults are also becoming increasingly blurred (Appell, 2010; Barnes, 2014). In the organizational realm, one now finds global, virtual organizations in a constant process of change and in the field of work, many people fulfill in several positions concurrently and change employers and even occupations frequently (Coetzee, 2012; Green, 2013).

One of the main catalysts of these and other changes is, of course, accelerated technological development, which enables constant communication, access to knowledge wherever one is located from any place in the world, transfer of knowledge in tremendous volume at high speed, as well as the collection and analysis of information in unprecedented scope. A good part of the communication between people today takes place using technological devices; the role of words and sentences is increasingly being replaced by graphic representations and short words (Agger, 2011; Aviram, 2010; Oprea, 2014). These changes, as noted, have influenced different aspects of our lives, among them the development of pedagogical views in the constructivist spirit, the roles and composition of the family, the skills (intrapersonal and interpersonal) required for success, and the way in which people communicate with one another.

Against this background, it is very important to examine the choice of homeschooling both as a form of pedagogy and as a lifestyle. It is also necessary, as noted, to understand this practice from the viewpoint of the young people who are homeschooled. However, to date no study has been conducted in Israel on homeschooling from the point of view of adolescents and young adults (ages 16–22). Young people of these ages who have been homeschooled may offer in-depth observations and reflect on the processes and experiences they underwent in the homeschooling framework, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of this choice, which their parents made for them. In most cases, the data for research on this subject in general, and in Israel especially, have been collected from parents. Therefore, in the present study, it was important to look at homeschooling purely from the point of view of the adolescents. They are young enough to remember their homeschooling experience clearly. For these reasons, the aim of the present research was to examine the way in which home-schooled young people evaluate homeschooling.

Methods

The present study was conducted using qualitative research methods. The choice of this method arose from the nature of the research, which investigated homeschooling from a perspective that has received little scholarly attention worldwide and has not been examined in Israel to date, namely, that of adolescents and young adults. In fact, this research represents an attempt to examine the perceptions of the interviewees regarding homeschooling (i.e., the advantages and disadvantages of homeschooling, as well as the influence of homeschooling on them and their families); therefore, open, qualitative tools were appropriate. Such instruments enable interviewees to describe their perceptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Glense & Peshkin, 1992; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

Research participants

The research participants were 19 adolescents who were homeschooled. The practice of homeschooling is relatively new in Israel; therefore, there is only a small number of young adults who have been homeschooled. Nowadays, as noted, there are several hundred children in homeschooling, but two decades ago there were only a few dozen. These are the people that the present research refers to, and therefore the total population was not large.

The ages of the participants ranged from 16 to 22 ($m = 17.97$, $SD = 2.04$). Ten of them were men and 9 were women. All the participants had been homeschooled for at least four years and 11 of them were homeschooled for their entire education. Seven defined themselves as religious and the others were nonreligious.

It was assumed that the interviewees did not know the precise income of the families in which they were raised; therefore, we did not collect this data. In order to estimate SES, we asked about the education of their parents. The average education of the mothers was 16.10 ($SD = 1.86$), and of the fathers, 17.37 ($SD = 2.81$). All the fathers of the interviewed families were employed. Only 3 of the mothers reported that they did not work.

Research procedure and instruments

A general invitation to participate in the research was posted on social networks of homeschoolers. Every person who agreed to participate in the research was asked, among other things, whether he or she knew other young people who might be interested. The research participants were administered in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The objective of the research was explained to each participant as well as their parents. Afterward, each participant and one of his or her parents were asked to sign a document of informed consent.

The semi-structured interviews included a general conversation about homeschooling, as well as a series of questions intended to examine how the young people evaluated homeschooling. This series of questions was divided into direct and indirect questions. The interview included three direct questions, in which the participants were asked to note advantages and disadvantages of homeschooling and rate the influence of homeschooling on them and their families. Their evaluation of homeschooling was also examined by means of indirect questions, in which their opinions on the public school system were elicited, and they were asked to compare homeschooling and school education. Each of the interviews was recorded using two recording devices.

Data analysis

The recorded interviews were transcribed, and a Word file was created of each interview. The Atlas Ti7 software program for qualitative data analysis was used to analyze the interviews. For this purpose, the interviews are uploaded into the program and different passages of text can be

associated with themes (or codes, as they are called in the software). These themes could then be organized into super-themes (or families, according to the software).

The process of thematic analysis included three stages (in accordance with Giorgi, 1975). The first stage involved finding the relevant text passages. In the second stage, the preliminary analysis, each of the relevant text passages found in the first stage was given a title reflecting its main idea. In addition, the themes were divided into advantages and disadvantages, based on the perspectives of the interviewees. There were no disagreements among the interviewees regarding the categorization of the respective themes as advantages or disadvantages. At the end of this stage, every relevant text passage had a title, which represented the theme that appeared in that passage. In the third stage, the mapping analysis, different themes found in the second stage were combined into super-themes. At the end of this stage, each unit of relevant text was associated with a theme, and each theme was associated with a super-theme.

To examine the reliability of the thematic analysis, Lincoln and Guba's (1986) concept of trustworthiness was applied. After the researcher completed the second and third stages of the thematic analysis, the results were given to another researcher for critical observation. In cases of disagreement between the colleagues regarding the thematic analysis, a discussion was held until the two researchers reached agreement.

The results of the thematic analysis are presented in the section on Results. When the thematic analysis was complete, the results were examined in order to formulate a theoretical statement. The results of this part of the research are presented in the Discussion section.

Results

Four super-themes were derived from the evaluations of homeschooling by the adolescents: content and methods of instruction and learning, outcomes of homeschooling in terms of personal traits, outcomes in terms of family aspects, and outcomes in terms of social aspects. The research findings are presented according to this division. For each super-theme, the associated themes that emerged are presented. Based on how the interviewees presented these themes, they are divided into advantages or disadvantages.

Super-theme: Content and methods of instruction and learning

Advantages

Choice. The interviewees noted that the ability to choose what they studied was significant to them. According to them, in addition to the importance of choice as a value in its own right, it also leads to studying based on interest, as shown below.

I really like it that I can choose to do what I want. I don't go by the saying that we do this or that because someone else decided we would. (13)

Independence, freedom of choice, I can choose for myself what interests me, what I want to do, and others don't determine everything for me. (8)

Interest-based studying. This category was mentioned more than any other in the interviews. The interviewees noted that the ability to decide what to study (mentioned earlier) meant that their studies were based on interest and inner motivation. For them, interest-based studying was the desirable way to learn, because it leads to pleasure from studying and more meaningful learning, which remains with the learner and isn't forgotten immediately after the studying ends. Some of the interviewees contrasted interest-based studying in homeschooling with the compulsory studying that occurs, in their view, in schools.

At school, they don't teach you to enjoy learning. In my view, that's very very important, and in homeschooling it's the main thing ... it's a sort of principle that if you love it you will learn it, it will be absorbed. I strongly believe in this. (14)

Actually, I studied only what I wanted to, what was interesting to me at the time, and most of the time, it stays in your brain after you finish studying. (12)

Adapted studying: Method, time, and pace of studies. The interviewees noted that the homeschooling method of studying was adapted to their needs, their pace, and the times they preferred. In their view, this adaption enabled them to learn effectively and with pleasure. For example, they expressed the view that children who study at a pace that suits them and not one dictated by the environment (as in school) will learn more effectively. They also assumed that children who study at times that are unsuitable for them learn less effectively than those who study at times that do suit them. According to them, homeschooling enables to maximize learning by adapting personally to each child.

In homeschooling, it's really personal, as though each child gets what he needs, using the method of teaching that most suits him. (8)

The homeschooling progressed at my pace. It didn't move at the pace of the school, the framework, or the slowest kid in the class . . . There are children in the class that are smart and they need, like, they're fast and they catch onto everything very quickly and then they get bored. And there are those who are slower, who don't succeed in keeping up with the pace of learning and in a class – what can you do – you have to set one pace and that's the pace. At home, in contrast, everything is at my pace ... in homeschooling, you manage to cover the material that you manage to cover. (16)

Relevant studying – connected to life. The interviewees mentioned that in the homeschooling framework, they were exposed to subject matter related to functioning in daily life in the adult world. For example, accompanying a parent during the day brought them into contact with different institutions, such as the bank or the business world.

And this [homeschooling] also opens the whole world up to me. Because my mother had to take us on her errands, we got to know the bank and the concepts of the bank well and we got to know the post office and the services of the ministry of interior and everything needed. We got to know this world, these offices, the people, the concepts. I think someone who isn't familiar with this reaches age 18 and suddenly has to go here and there and doesn't know what it's about, so they can sort of get lost. And we already knew this world very well. (16)

I learned from an early age to be in the real world, with adults. If I don't do something with my life, nothing will happen, and for [children who attend school], that situation doesn't happen until they get out of the army [at age 21]. (12)

Exposure to diverse subjects. The interviewees mentioned that thanks to homeschooling, they were exposed to subjects they would not have encountered if they had attended school. Examples included familiarization with different fields of sport, in-depth engagement in disciplines that aren't taught at school, trips to museums, parks, and so forth. They also noted that because of homeschooling, they were able to start higher education at an early age.

It gave me a lot of time to look for other things that I don't think I'd have time for at school, things I didn't know interested me. You start to connect to other things. An example that comes to mind ... is that there are many people who are involved in [special sports] ... it's something I really connected to, totally because I was in homeschooling. (14)

As I said, it's true that I go to university, so if I think about this ... I don't have any need to go to school; it doesn't do me any good. In terms of learning, I don't need a matriculation certificate for a degree. Here I am doing a degree, so what's the point of going to school? (18)

Disadvantages

Lack of skill in taking exams. An interesting finding was that the interviewees noted that they lacked skill in taking exams, skills that are acquired naturally by children who attend schools, due to the fact that they need to take frequent exams.

It's difficult to take tests, too, so one of the things I don't know is how to take tests. In the army, they'll give me problems about this [that I don't know how to take tests]. (11)

I have a bit more difficulty studying, I study well, get to the exam and I don't remember anything. It's not a blackout; it always happens to me. It's hard for me to express myself in writing, skills like that. (5)

Lack of a framework and external motivation. The interviewees noted that they lacked a framework that would help them study and give them external motivation to study.

If you don't have parents who really know what your direction is, or you are a younger child, who in most cases doesn't know, either, then there are simply infinite possibilities and, in the end, you don't get anywhere, you don't know which way to turn. You really get lost that way. It's really necessary ... to reduce this and give you direction, give you a path, a push to do things and learn things. In addition, there may also be cases of people who simply don't know how to do things alone, and they need this help of a framework. (15)

Sometimes, yes, I would like them to decide about me, because it's a bit difficult all the time to decide and my life is pretty much my responsibility. (13)

Super-theme: Outcomes – personal traits

With respect to the super-theme of outcomes – personal traits, the interviewees mentioned traits they acquired in the course of homeschooling. They mentioned only advantages in relation to this theme.

Knowing oneself

The interviewees noted that homeschooling helped them get to know themselves, their strengths, and their motives for action.

I think it [homeschooling] gave me true independence and maturity at a relatively young age, both in terms of self-awareness and in terms of how I conducted myself in the big world, that regular children are not exposed to so many things at such an age usually. And I think that we were also given an option to go out into the world, simply to be more independent and understand who we were at a younger age, and not only start to think about this at age 18, but already from a younger age, to begin thinking about who I am, what I do well, what motivated me, what I believe in, that kind of thing. (8)

Confidence in the ability to study (independent learner) and development of a desire to study

The interviewees noted that they acquired confidence in their ability to study diverse subjects on their own. They assumed that if they had attended schools they would not have gained such confidence in their ability to study independently. They also mentioned that they developed a desire to study.

[In the homeschooling framework, I was given] the freedom to choose what to learn, when to learn, and how to learn myself. And this, to a great extent, is the source of my ability to study, that I can address a subject and learn about it. I don't know whether that would be so if I were in school ... What did I get? ... mainly interest in knowledge, and confidence that I can look for the knowledge and learn it. And there is no such thing as an area that is too difficult for me to learn. If I sit down with it, I'll manage with any field. (2)

I met many people who said, "You don't have an education, so you won't do anything with your life." But I don't agree with that, because in fact, you can do everything with this. They say, "What if you want to go to university?" So, I will sit my bottom down and do a preparatory course and complete the matriculation exams. (10)

Development of imagination and critical thinking

The interviewees noted that homeschooling helped them develop an imagination and critical thinking. One of the interviewees, for instance, described the unique nature of homeschooling that lies, among other things, in the fact that they don't accept everything at face value, but ask questions and cast doubt.

Children who attend school have the view of "that's what people do, that's the way of the world, that's what we do because you have to," and in homeschooling, we ask a few more questions and make decisions less according to what is said, and based more on: "That doesn't interest me, that does interest me. Why is that so? Does it have to be like that?" and then we examine it, and so forth. (13)

I really like to imagine things, so it doesn't seem to me that schoolchildren imagine so much, it's as though I am playing imagining games and so forth. (11)

Super-theme: Outcomes – family

With respect to outcomes related to family, the interviewees noted different aspects of the outcomes of homeschooling for their families, in general, as well as for themselves, as part of their families. With regard to this theme, only advantages were cited.

Strengthening family ties

The interviewees noted that homeschooling helped strengthen the ties in their family. In particular, they referred to the long time spent together and the need to get along with family members for a long period.

I think that it [homeschooling] really strengthened our ties. Between my mother and me, between my siblings and me. Before I began homeschooling, my mother would go out to work all day and she wouldn't return on time, after school. She had to leave us in afternoon programs and after that we had a babysitter and we hardly saw her. She would leave early in the morning and return when we had already gone to sleep. (16)

And simply, everyone has a very open and supportive approach and I think this always made us very close. We are a very, very close-knit family, among the siblings and between us and the parents. We had lots of time together, and did many things together, and I think this created strong ties among us and it wasn't that we were together only for a few hours in the evening before going to bed. We were really together a lot of time, a very close family. (8)

Mutual support in studying

The adolescent interviewees also noted that their siblings supported their studying and that their studying was influenced, among other things, by the fields of interest of their brothers and sisters.

If there are a few siblings of different ages, usually they are very close at home. Each one can draw from the fields that interest the other, and from what the other is involved in. Like, a large part of why I studied physics is that my brother began to take an interest in physics. And then I liked debating with him about things. So, I studied [physics] so I could argue with him better. The relationship between siblings is empowering and it also places focus on this. (2)

Super-theme: Outcomes – social aspects

With regard to the super-theme of outcomes from the social perspective, the interviewees noted different aspects associated with their relationship with society. The passages related to this super-theme indicated only disadvantages.

Lack of a social "stamp of approval"

The young people interviewed noted that children who go to school and pass the matriculation tests receive a sort of social stamp of approval, indicating their ability to function in social frameworks

and enabling them to continue advancing in life, in the army, in studies, and at work, but children who are homeschooled lack such a stamp of approval.

For example, I go to take matriculation tests and I go to volunteer in the army. Not really because I think it will help me, but mainly because I want to look for work, and this is what people will ask about. That's what they want me to have. They want me to succeed in matriculation tests. And for me to have a certain position. School is more or less the same thing. If I succeed at school, people will know I'm used to all sorts of existing employment frameworks, and that there's at least a better chance I know what I'm doing. (3)

Matriculation tests – yes. It's goal-oriented, it's for approval. For myself, I don't need this approval but it helps people who come to work with me, helps them know. (2)

Being different from others

The adolescents noted that they felt different from other adolescents who attended school. This was expressed in different experiences, in association with varying topics of conversation, and in a frequent need to explain what homeschooling is.

There are many common subjects amongst those who attended school. Most of the people in Israel go to school, and that's a shared experience they have. When I talk to them, I don't have that. There are other things, but not that. (2)

Sometimes it's a bit frustrating that I am different from everyone. I meet children who go to school and they are all relatively similar, the same thing ... not exactly the same, but more or less so compared with me, it's relatively similar I make a big effort to find common topics of conversation and there are many things I don't agree with them on. (13)

Too few friends

Many of the interviewees noted that the social diversity available to them in homeschooling was limited and they were interested in having more friends and friends who were more longstanding. They compared their situation with that of children who attended school, whom they believed had access to more social diversity and more stable relationships.

The main disadvantage that I think homeschooling has is the uncertainty of a social circle. Not always, there are much less, and [in schools] there are a lot. But we pretty much started it in the north, and there weren't so many people. When I got older ... I began thinking about going to school, just so I'd feel I had friends. (19)

A great disadvantage is the social disadvantage. Overall, I have few people to meet. I don't know many people; I know a few and I know them well, but I don't have the chance to communicate with a large number of people on a daily basis. (17)

Not enough social preparation

The interviewees noted that in their view, exposure to many different people prepares children for social life and creates ties with diverse people. Such an exposure happens naturally at schools, but not enough in the framework of homeschooling.

If the child is really shy and he stays at home and studies at home, he doesn't go out on his own to find friends and ... he will grow up and not really know how to behave with people. (9)

Nobody ever made me, nobody ever forced me to speak with someone I didn't like. I might not know how to speak with idiots or something. (12)

The findings described here are summarized in [Table 1](#), which presents the themes that arose in the interviews. These themes are divided into the four super-themes.

Discussion

The present research examined how adolescents who were raised in a homeschooling framework evaluated homeschooling. Diverse themes emerged from the findings, which could be divided into

Table 1. Evaluation of homeschooling by adolescents: Themes and super-themes.

Super-theme	Evaluation	Themes
Content and methods of instruction and learning	Advantages	Choice Interest-based studying Adapted studying (method, time, and pace of studies) Relevant studying – connected to life Exposure to diverse subjects
	Disadvantages	Lack of skill in taking exams Lack of a framework and external motivation
Outcomes – Personal traits	Advantages	Knowing oneself Confidence in the ability to study (independent learner) and development of a desire to study Development of imagination and critical thinking
Outcomes – Family	Advantages	Strengthening family ties Mutual support in studying
Outcomes – Social aspects	Disadvantages	Lack of a social “stamp of approval” Being different from others Too few friends Not enough social preparation

four main super-themes: content and methods of instruction and learning; outcomes – personal traits; outcomes – family; and outcomes – social aspects. With regard to the first theme, the interviewees mentioned both advantages and disadvantages; regarding the second and third, they cited only advantages; in reference to the fourth super-theme, they cited only disadvantages.

The examination of these findings revealed some interesting insights. First, examining the first and second super-themes reveals that they deal with methods of instruction and constructivist learning, as well as the outcomes of such studies. The constructivist approach is rooted, among other things, in the cognitive development theory of Piaget, indicating that people encountering a phenomenon in reality build personal knowledge according to their previous knowledge and thus are active in the learning process (Bringuier, 1980; Piaget, 2013; Piaget & Inhelder, 2008). The constructivist approach is also grounded in Vygotsky’s (1980) sociopsychological theory, which contends that the process of a person acquiring and creating knowledge always occurs in a social context. That is, it arises from not only the encounter of new and previous knowledge, but also the interrelationship of the person and the environment. Constructivist theory integrates both these approaches.

According to constructivist theory, learning involves the creation of meaning based on experience. The real world does exist, but what we know about it arises from the way in which we interpret our experiences. People derive meaning from the experiences they undergo based on prior knowledge (Ertmer & Newby, 2013). Students must find a connection between the old knowledge and the new information to which they are exposed. To this end, they must exercise critical thinking – comparing, asking, challenging, and researching – and accept or reject the new knowledge as well as the old beliefs and perceptions, in order to move forward.

To create meaning, learners must take an active role in their learning. Indeed, one of the central principles of constructivist theory of learning is an active, independent learner. Furthermore, for learners to take an active part in learning, they must choose from a variety of possible topics the ones that interest them or are relevant to them, and study these in ways that are suitable for them (Cooperstein & Kocevar-Weidinger, 2004; Prawat & Floden, 1994).

For learners to do this, they must have characteristics of independent learners and skills of self-direction, that is, know themselves and their abilities and weaknesses, and be capable of creating learning processes – to define goals, make plans, implement them, and evaluate their degree of success in achieving the goals (Hrynchak & Batty, 2012).

These aspects of constructivist learning emerged from the first two themes in this research. The advantages that the adolescents described in association with the first theme were related to exposure to many subjects and the ability to choose, interest-based study, relevant studying, and studying

adapted to the student. The characteristics that the adolescents described in association with the second theme were traits of independent learners with self-direction: knowing oneself and confidence in one's ability to study. The trait associated with imagination and critical thinking is essential to any process of constructivist learning.

It is interesting that in their descriptions of the disadvantages associated with the first super-theme, the interviewees referred to aspects of conventional learning: test-taking skill, an external framework, and external motivation to study. This might indicate a conflict between, on one hand, recognizing that constructivist learning is desirable and suitable for our times, as well as for the adolescents themselves, and, on the other hand, the understanding that conducting oneself in the world today also requires skills and abilities acquired in the traditional framework, which are not acquired in constructivist learning (such as actions based on external motivation).

It is also interesting that these findings, which are based on interviews with young adults who were homeschooled, are consistent with an earlier study conducted among mothers who home-schooled their children, which showed that their educational views fit the constructivist theory (Neuman & Guterman, 2016b). Boulter (1999) also found that homeschooling is often consistent with the constructivist view and the teachings of Piaget and Vygotsky. A review of the research literature in Australia revealed that families homeschooled in the spirit of Vygotsky (Jackson, 2008). Alamry and Karaali (2016) suggested a model of learning in homeschooling that is based on the perception of a flipped classroom, which is based, among other things, on Piaget's active learning approach. Other research on the curriculum taught to homeschooled children indicated that as children get older, their study subjects and ways of learning become more complex and challenging for the parents (Hanna, 2012; Laats, 2010). One of the findings that has arisen repeatedly in the research of homeschooling is that homeschooling that begins in a structured manner becomes increasingly more unstructured, allowing the children more choice of what they learn (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013), and therefore also more closely associated with the constructivist perspective.

In further research, it would be interesting to investigate the source of the constructivist perceptions of the parents and children, for instance, to determine whether this is part of the reaction to the lack of relevance of the subjects taught in the schools for daily life in postmodern times (Aviram, 2010).

Second, the third super-theme represented advantages noted by the interviewees that pertained to the family. It is reasonable to assume that homeschooling allows strengthening of family ties, mainly because of the need to spend a great deal of time and perform a variety of daily activities together with the family.

It also can be assumed that the long time that members of the family spend together and the many shared experiences, some of them related to learning processes, enable the adolescents to develop a world of shared concepts and experiences with regard to learning as well. This usually does not occur when children attend school and their parents go to work.

In further research, it would be interesting to examine how homeschooled adolescents perceive the family, and perhaps compare this with the views of adolescents who attend school. Wyatt (2008) noted that parents choose homeschooling not only for pedagogical or religious reasons, but also, to a significant extent, in order to create stronger and more meaningful relationships within the family, compared with those that would exist if the children attended school. Brabant et al. (2003) also found that the family component was a significant factor in the choice parents make to homeschool. Another interesting aspect of the role of the family in homeschooling is that the reciprocal relations within the family are likely to become part of the children's learning process (Barratt-Peacock, 2003). This finding regarding the family status is very interesting. Contrary to the previous findings, which emphasized constructivist pedagogy in the spirit of the postmodern era, this finding suggests a trend opposite to the weakening of the traditional family structure that is commonly associated with the postmodern era. It would also be interesting in future research to examine the perspective of the parents on this subject, especially considering research that has shown the complexity involved in the dual role of homeschooling parents as both parents and teachers (Lois, 2006, 2013).

Third, the fourth super-theme included descriptions of the disadvantages of homeschooling from the social perspective. The analysis of the interviews indicated that the adolescents thought their peers who attended school were better prepared in terms of some social aspects, compared with those who were homeschooled, because they spent more time at school and acquired more social skills compared with the homeschooled children.

It is interesting that other studies (McKinley, Asaro, Bergin, D'Auria, & Gagnon, 2007; Medlin, 2000; Romanowski, 2006; Rothermel, 1999; Shyers, 1992; Smedley, 1992; Taylor, 1986) have shown that children who are homeschooled have no fewer social skills than children who attend school. The findings of the present research indicate that the interviewees thought differently, and felt that they lacked certain types of social skills. This discrepancy between the present findings and those of previous research might be explained by the time in which the interviewees grew up, when there was very little homeschooling, in quantitative terms, and, accordingly, a limited social circle of homeschooled children. Perhaps for these children, there was a tradeoff between family and social aspects: the strengthening of one came at the expense of difficulty with the other. However, as noted, the practice of homeschooling has grown in Israel and there are now many active social groups of homeschooled families in different regions of the country. Therefore, the situation for the younger children who are now being homeschooled is likely to be different from that of the interviewees. In further research, it would be interesting to examine views regarding social and family dimensions among these younger homeschooled children, as they grow up.

Fourth, examination of the second and fourth super-themes indicated that they reflect two contradicting approaches to the subject of educational goals. Different scholars have divided educational goals into three main groups, claiming as Lamm (1976) put it, that "education serves three masters: society, culture and the individual." Every educational act can be directed to serve one of the three. To serve society, the goal of education would be socialization – the preparation of young people to function well in society; to serve culture, the goal of education would be acculturation – teaching the fundamental values and beliefs of the culture to which the young people belong; and to serve the individual, the goal of education would be individualization – realizing the full personal potential and self-fulfillment of each student (Egan, 1997; Lamm, 1976; Rorty, 1999).

These three overall goals of education rely upon three different perspectives. The first holds that people should fulfill a social purpose; thus, understanding history from a social perspective and preparing young people to contribute to society is the fitting goal of education. According to the second perspective, culture is the purpose of humankind; thus, education should teach young people the history of human culture and give them tools to continue to develop it. Finally, the third perspective sees the goal of humans as development of each person as an individual, so that education should help people get to know themselves, their abilities, and their limitations, as well as their desires and needs, and encourage them to fulfill these wishes and needs and to realize their personal potential.

The conclusions that emerge from the views of these scholars indicate that these three educational goals conflict with each other, and therefore the name, "the conflicting theories of instruction." According to this theory, it is impossible to educate toward more than one goal at the same time and any attempt to do so could cause students to develop undesirable attitudes and behaviors, such as apathy and cynicism.

Examination of the findings in light of these educational goals indicates that the second super-theme referred to outcomes in terms of traits that are associated with the educational goal of individualization, but the fourth super-theme referred to outcomes regarding the social aspect that are associated with the educational goal of socialization. The fact that the results regarding the second super-theme were presented as advantages and those regarding the fourth super-theme were presented as disadvantages might suggest that the adolescents realized they had undergone learning processes related to the goal of individualization, and that this took a toll on processes of their socialization.

This finding is interesting considering that the postmodern era is generally characterized by a strengthening of individualism, at the expense of values of socialization and acculturation. It is also noteworthy that the children educated at home recognized the value of education toward individualization they received, but at the same time felt a lack of some aspects of education toward socialization.

These findings are also consistent with those of other studies that have shown that older homeschooled children feel isolated (Jackson, 2016; Kunzman, 2009), as in the case of gifted homeschooled children (Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2013; Winstanley, 2009).

These findings, which were based on interviews with adolescents, are consistent with the results of earlier research conducted among homeschooling mothers, which found that a considerable portion of the educational goals raised by the mothers were associated with the educational goal of individualization (Neuman & Guterman, 2017).

Limitations and recommendations for further research

Some limitations of the present research should be considered. First, this was a qualitative study that examined a small group of adolescents and described their point of view regarding aspects of homeschooling and constructivist theory, the conflict between family and society in homeschooling, and the conflict between the educational goals of individualization and socialization in homeschooling. In light of this, and since homeschooling is not necessarily a phenomenon with a single unique nature, the question arises whether other groups of adolescents would indicate other conflicts that better represent their societies. In further research, it is important to examine these aspects among different groups of homeschooled adolescents, perhaps using quantitative instruments.

Second, the present research represents the first study to focus on the attitudes of adolescents in Israel toward homeschooling. Therefore, it was limited to an examination of homeschooling from the perspective of adolescents alone, and not adolescents and their parents at the same time. In further research, the different aspects that emerged in this research should be examined among adolescents and their parents, alike. Such an investigation could provide a fuller picture, by enabling examination of the same issues from two perspectives, as well as their interrelationship and interaction. The perspective of parents could reveal the intentions in the educational process, and thus help develop a prescriptive or normative theory that would shed light on what the parents wished to achieve. This theory could then be examined in light of the adolescents' view of what was actually achieved – in other words, a descriptive theory.

Third, the research was conducted with homeschooled adolescents without differentiating between different types of homeschooling. It is reasonable to assume that the type of homeschooling practiced influences the evaluations of adolescents, but at this stage there is insufficient information about the distribution of the different types of homeschooling in Israel. When such information becomes available, the evaluation of homeschooling by adolescents should be examined, among other things, by the type of homeschooling in which they have been raised. In addition, most of the research participants in this study were adolescents who had been in homeschooling for many years; therefore, it would also be interesting in future research to include a significant number of adolescents who had experienced mainstream education for a long period, and compare them with those who never experienced mainstream education. This would help us understand how the adolescents formed their ideas about the experience of mainstream education.

Finally, this research was based on adolescent self-reporting, which can sometimes be unreliable (Robinson-Cimpian, 2014; Savin-Williams & Jaquish, 1981; Sherry, Jefferds, & Grummer-Strawn, 2007). In further research, it would be interesting to attempt to corroborate self-reports of adolescents with researcher-observations or reports of third parties.

Potential contribution of the research

Despite these limitations, the present research could be important for several reasons. The first is the selection of the participants. Most of the existing information on homeschooling is derived from

parents and from data on the academic achievements of homeschooled children. It is very important to understand homeschooling from the perceptions of the children raised in this setting; therefore, it is necessary to gather information from homeschooled adolescents, as done in the present study.

The second potential contribution lies in the attempt to consider homeschooling from the perspectives of broader and more comprehensive educational approaches and theories that are relevant beyond the subject of homeschooling, such as constructivist learning and the three main goals of education.

Finally, in terms of the practice, the results of this study may be interesting to parents involved in homeschooling. These parents are usually familiar with the views and approaches of their children, but the present research, which maps out the approaches and perceptions of homeschooled adolescents, enables parents to examine the location of their children on a broader map that includes the perception of other homeschooled adolescents. Such a process could contribute to improvement of the practices of homeschooling parents.

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ORCID

Ari Neuman  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1416-5522>

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