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Different solutions to similar problems: parents' reasons for choosing to homeschool and social criticism of the education system

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ABSTRACT

The article addresses the way in which characteristics of the education crisis in the postmodern era are manifested in parental deliberations when choosing to homeschool their children in Israel. Based on a review of the characteristics of the education crisis and examination of possible solutions, homeschooling is presented as an optional solution to this crisis. The article is based on a qualitative study that examined the reasons of Israeli parents for selecting homeschooling, which demonstrates the link between the deliberation process of those choosing homeschooling and the characteristics of the education crisis. The article ends with an explanation about why it is important to regard homeschooling as a unique solution.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Education crisis characteristics.
- Possible solutions for the education crisis.
- Home education as one of the possible solutions for the education crisis.
- Link between the deliberation process of those choosing home education and the education crisis.
- The importance of regarding home education as one of the solutions to the crisis in education.

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Introduction

The education system is the subject of ongoing debate. Some people highlight different positive aspects of this system, and others, its shortcomings. The different arguments address various aspects of the education system and are based partially on empirical data and partially on public opinion.

The present article does not presume to resolve this debate or even to take sides in it. Rather, it represents an attempt to examine a unique and interesting educational phenomenon, homeschooling, as a part of this debate. Is homeschooling a unique and isolated phenomenon, or is it a part of the much broader social debate?

Criticism of education systems in a postmodern world

Criticism of the education system is not a new phenomenon; throughout the years, many scholars and practitioners have voiced such views. The arguments refer to different, seemingly

unrelated aspects of the education system. For example, with reference to the United States and from the social perspective, Hurn (1978) claimed that schools perpetuate inequality and Russell (2009) criticized the use of the education system by the state. From the pedagogical perspective, Holt (2017) criticized the teaching methods employed in schools, Neill (1953) advocated paedocentric education, and Illich (1970) argued the case for complete de-schooling of society.

There are, of course, numerous other scholars who have criticized the education system. However, in order to gain a deeper understanding of criticism directed towards the education system, it is important to formulate a holistic model that addresses claims regarding its different aspects.

One recent critic of the education system, the Israeli scholar, Aviram (2010), suggested such a holistic model in his book, *Navigating through the storm*. Whether one accepts this perception or not, the very existence of such criticism among the public is both interesting and important, because it might influence the decisions parents make regarding their children's education.

Aviram (2010), who focused on education systems in the Western world, as well as in Israel, described various shortcomings of these systems, describing them as in a state of "educational crisis." He claimed that one of the key reasons for the shortcomings is the "anomaly of the education system" – the ever-growing disparity between fundamental aspects of the system (such as goals, content, organizational structure) that evolved in the modern era and today's postmodern reality. This anomaly, he argued, has produced a series of unique characteristics in the education system, which are manifested in the system's goals, performance, and results.

At the level of goals, Aviram held that the education system has lost its goals, so that it is no longer clear what the system is trying to achieve. Goals give the act of education meaning; when they are not defined or frequently redefined, or when there is lack of consensus regarding them, many of the activities of the education system may lose their significance (Aviram, 1996, 2010; Biesta, 2009). In the United States, Rothstein and Jacobsen (2006) argued that Americans' views of public school goals were diverse and concentrated, among others, on basic academic skills in core subjects, critical thinking and problem solving, social skills and the work ethic, citizenship and community responsibility, preparation for skilled work, physical health, emotional health, and the arts and literature.

At the level of the system's performance, Aviram, like others, claimed that in many cases, students and parents perceive school activities as irrelevant to everyday life, as well as to the future of the children. Schools focus on imparting knowledge rather than teaching high-order cognitive skills, and encourage uniform, standardized, inflexible learning. Critics have charged that these learning and teaching processes are outdated and irrelevant to the postmodern world. Moreover, the quality of the learning process is perceived as insufficient (Aviram, 2010; Wagner, 2010) in Israel and elsewhere. Referring to the US, Prensky (2011) argued that most school reforms were on the wrong track; he contended that one should not try to fix the system, but rather fix education itself. With respect to aspect of performance, studies have shown high rates of teacher burnout and teacher dropout during the first years of teaching in various countries, including Israel. They have also indicated a decline in the quality of people who choose to teach in schools (Dworkin, 1987; Hultell, Melin, & Gustavsson, 2013; O'Reilly, 2005; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999). A study conducted by Abel and Sewell (1999) in the US revealed that student misbehavior and time pressures were two of the most significant factors in teacher burnout.

At the level of the results of the education system, some studies have shown a decrease in scholastic achievement, as described in the Australian context by Ryan (2013), in the Danish context by Teasdale and Owen (2005) and in the Israeli context by Aviram (2010) and by Cahan, Casali, Herskovitz, and Segev (2017). In addition, research has revealed higher levels of student alienation from the schools and from teachers (Aviram, 2010; Calabrese & Seldin, 1986; Huling, 1980; Kohn, 1999); increased student dropout rates in the US (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991; Rumberger, 2011; Rumberger & Lim, 2008), and a rise in violent activity among students and between students and teachers (Benbenishty, 2005; Kohn, 1999; Lawrence, 1997; Peguero, 2011).

Research conducted in the US by Flannery, Wester, and Singer (2004) demonstrated the vast impact of school violence on students and showed that one does not have to be subjected to violence to be affected by it. The mere witnessing of violent acts at school was found to significantly affect the wellbeing of students.

Naturally, Aviram's social criticism of the education system is relevant for Israel, as well (David, 2010; Wolff & Breit, 2012), particularly with respect to the large classes, which exacerbate teacher burnout and student dropout (Gavish & Friedman, 2010); the academic level of public schools, which leads to the choice of schools outside the national mainstream (MacKenzie, 2010); violent activity among students (Khoury-Kassabri, 2011); poor scholastic achievement (Cahan et al., 2017; Razer, Mittelberg, & Ayalon, 2018), and the like.

Responses to the criticism of education system

As noted, there is no consensus regarding the criticism described above. However, different stakeholders in the education system (from policy makers to staff and educators, students, and parents) who agree with this criticism are seeking solutions to what they perceive as a growing anomaly of the education system. These solutions can be divided into two main categories.

The first category consists of solutions within the education system. These proposed remedies are based on the premise that the existing education system can be "fixed" by reducing or even eliminating its problems. Such solutions focus on efforts to generate changes within the existing educational systems. At the level of the system, they include a series of continual far-reaching reforms, each addressing a different group of problems (Aviram, 2010). At the local level, these solutions include attempts to implement changes in existing schools and classrooms.

The second category consists of solutions outside the education system. These are based on the assumption that changing the existing education system is a difficult and lengthy process, and perhaps even impossible to implement. Therefore, they focus on the development of alternative education systems. At the level of the system, these solutions include establishing independent education systems and chains of public, private, or semi-private schools such as charter schools, essential schools, democratic schools, and others. At the local level, these solutions include establishing alternative educational institutions to meet the needs of specific population groups.

Both these categories refer to the curriculum taught as well as the methods and location of instruction. The solutions in the first category are aimed at significant changes in the curriculum and sometimes in the manner of instruction, but not in the location (schools). The second category is also directed at change in curriculum and sometimes teaching methods, but it includes alternatives to the existing educational institutions, as well. Thus the first category involves change within the public education system and the second, outside of it. This is currently the case in many countries in the Western world.

The present article addresses the question of whether and in what ways the phenomenon known as homeschooling represents a solution to the education crisis. To this end, the homeschooling phenomenon is briefly described below.

Homeschooling

Homeschooling is a phenomenon in which children of all ages do not attend school and instead are educated in the home, usually as the result of parental choice (Neuman & Aviram, 2003, 2008). The extent of this phenomenon differs among countries. For example, in the USA approximately two million children are homeschooled, while in England that number stands at about 80,000; in Canada, the number is about 50,000; in Australia it is about 30,000, and in France it is about 2800 (Neuman & Guterman, 2013).

It is also interesting to note that the homeschooling phenomenon has been spreading throughout the western world in recent decades. This increase can be seen in the US, for example, where the number of homeschooled children, which was estimated to be tens of thousands in the 1970s, has now reached about two million (Aurini & Davies, 2005; Blok & Karsten, 2011; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Ray, 2011).

In Israel, homeschooling is a relatively recent development, having begun only two decades ago. At first, special permission from the education minister was required to homeschool legally. More recently, a special committee of the education ministry was appointed to grant such permission. It examines applications and decides on approval within 3 months. Such permission is granted for a period of no more than 2 years and must then be renewed. Parents who wish to homeschool must submit a detailed syllabus, including goals, methods of instruction, and means of evaluation, as well as consent to visits by education ministry inspectors. A considerable portion of homeschooling in Israel is done in the form of unschooling.

The scope and percentage of homeschooling in Israel has increased significantly. The number of homeschooling families in Israel is estimated to be more than 500, whereas two decades ago the estimated figure was 60. This represents less than one percent of all the children in Israel who study, but the practice has recently enjoyed extensive media coverage – articles in the press, television, and the internet. A considerable portion of the articles have presented homeschooling positively, as a unique and interesting alternative to the public education systems (Neuman & Guterman, 2013, 2016a).

The research on homeschooling has examined a variety of aspects of this phenomenon during recent decades, and tried to distinguish between different homeschooling groups, such as pedagogy homeschooling and ideology homeschooling, (Van Galen, 1988), structured and unstructured homeschooling, or unschooling (Aurini & Davies, 2005; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; Ray, 2000, 2010; Rothmel, 2011), as well as structured content homeschooling and structured process homeschooling (Neuman & Guterman, 2016a).

In addition, studies on homeschooling have analyzed processes that occur within the homeschooling context (see Kunzman & Gaither, 2013 for an up-to-date review of the literature on this subject), as well as academic achievements of home-schooled children compared with school-going children (Neuman & Guterman, 2016b; Martin-Chang, Gould, & Meuse, 2011; Rothmel, 2004).

Many researchers have also tried to identify reasons for choosing the homeschooling option. These include religious ideology, liberal educational outlook, lack of faith in the education system, concern about high levels of violence in schools, belief in family values, health problems, and others (Anthony & Burroughs, 2010; Neuman & Aviram, 2008; Collom, 2005; Dumas, Gates, & Schwarzer, 2010; Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007).

When asked why they chose to homeschool, parents have usually referred to such reasons retrospectively. In a review of research on reasons for homeschooling, Spiegler (2010) found that parents did not cite stable, absolutely reasons, but rather retrospective constructions in response to the way they were treated (expectations, accusations, etc.). Morton (2010) noted three categories of reasons to homeschool: (a) a more natural, correct choice than schooling, (b) choice in the social context, (c) decision for lack of choice. In research on the stories of homeschooling mothers in Israel, two categories of reasons were identified: (a) rational, deliberate reasons, and (b) arbitrary, nondeliberate changes that led to homeschooling (Neuman, 2018). The results of another study conducted in Israel (Neuman & Guterman, 2017) revealed that some parents chose to homeschool for pedagogical reasons and others for both pedagogical and family-related reasons.

Research of the reasons for choosing to homeschool is important, among other things, because it reveals the underlying source of a choice that has profound influence on children, their parents, and others in their families. However, it is also important to consider the practice of homeschooling in its social context. Do the reasons that parents choose homeschooling

reflect a unique approach to education that is fundamentally different from that of parents who send their children to school, or are they, in fact, part of a wider trend of criticism of the education system, shared not only by parents who opt for homeschooling, but by others, as well?

The present study examined the reasons that motivate parents in Israel to choose homeschooling, and investigated if and in what ways the phenomenon known as homeschooling represents one of the solutions to the education crisis. If the reasons that motivate people to choose homeschooling correspond (even partially) with the characteristics of the education crisis, it can be argued that those who opt to homeschool do so in response to the education crisis, among other reasons.

Method

This study was based on the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, employing interview-based qualitative methodology to examine the ways in which people experience a phenomenon (Bruner, 1990; Craig, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Shkedi, 2011). This type of study is based on the premise (extracted from the constructivist paradigm) of the dynamic nature of the social reality and the knowledge that subsequently accrues in the context of social interactions, rather than as knowledge that exists independently in the observer and awaits discovery (Shkedi, 2011; Travers, 2001). Asking people to describe their experience and analyzing their responses might help researchers understand how these people perceive the phenomenon.

Study population

The study was conducted in Israel and included 30 mothers who practiced homeschooling. All the families that participated in the study defined the interviewed mother as the adult who spent the most time with the children. Interviewee ages ranged from 30 to 52, with an average of 38.69 ($SD = 4.32$). Average years of education for the mothers was 15.68 ($SD = 2.51$).

Each participant had at least one homeschooled child in the age group equivalent to elementary-school grades 1–6. The number of children in each family ranged from one to seven children, with an average of 3.38 ($SD = 1.33$). Twenty-seven of the participants were married and three were single. Twenty-eight of the participants were secular and two were religious (Table 1).

Study process and research tools

The data was collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in Hebrew. In the interview, reasons for choosing homeschooling were examined directly (by asking a direct question) and indirectly, by encouraging the interviewees to discuss homeschool-related topics, on the assumption that such conversations would reveal additional reasons for choosing homeschooling. Researchers recruited participants for the study at meetings of homeschooling families. After pre-arranging a suitable time, the interviewers visited the family home, and gave a detailed explanation of the study and its objectives. After signing consent forms, the mothers were interviewed for 1–2 h.

Table 1. Demographic attributes of interviewees, means and standard deviations.

Measure	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	38.69	4.32
Average years of education	15.68	2.51
Number of children in family	3.38	1.33

Data analysis

All the interviews were recorded using two voice recording devices and were transcribed verbatim. When the transcription was complete, all the interviews were converted to word processing files.

The transcribed interviews were analyzed using Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis program that enables methodical analysis of large quantities of text, identification of themes, examination of the connections between various themes, grouping of a number of themes to form “super-themes,” and preparation of a graphic representation of themes and the connections between them.

A researcher conducted the text analysis. Upon completion, the results of this analysis were examined critically by a colleague, according to Lincoln and Guba (1986) concept of peer debriefing. Disagreements between the researcher and the colleague regarding the outcome of the analysis were resolved through discussion. The analysis was based on Giorgi’s (1975) method, in which the text is divided into units of meaning, each of which is given a name or title that describes its content. After that, the units with common denominators are grouped into “super-themes.” In a similar method, Shkedi (2005, 2011) referred to the first and second stages as “preliminary analysis” and the third stage, when the themes are grouped together, as “mapping analysis.” As explained later, the first and second stages (or the preliminary analysis) are inductive, and the third stage (the mapping analysis) is deductive (in this case, according to characteristics of the education crisis).

The texts were analyzed in two stages. In the first, the inductive stage, a theme was assigned to each text segment in the interviews. These *in-vivo* themes were developed during analysis and did not derive from a preexisting conception. The themes were then divided into groups of themes that shared a common denominator.

In the second, deductive stage, the themes from the first stage were grouped into super-themes. The super-themes were derived from the characteristics of the education crisis noted at the beginning of this article, in accordance with Aviram’s (2010) taxonomy (goals, performance, and results). The combination of the inductive and deductive stages resulted in examination of the connection between what the participants said had led them to choose homeschooling and the characteristics of the education crisis.

Results

The results of the analysis indicated the key reasons related to the education system that had caused the interviewees to abandon the education system in favor of homeschooling. These reasons represent interviewee criticisms of the education system, which caused them to either remove their children from the education system or not enroll them in school from the outset.

The data analysis also revealed a number of reasons for homeschooling that were not connected to interviewee criticisms of the education system, such as their difficulty being separated from the children, and also the ideal of a united family. However, because these reasons are not directly connected to the education system, and are therefore not directly connected to the topic of this article, they are not elaborated here.

The interviews indicated criticism of the education system on a number of key fronts: standardization and its results; neglecting education in favor of learning; school climate; quality of teaching and learning processes; irrelevance of the education system to the student’s world, and the education system’s loss of goals. In the following, the findings are presented according to these themes. Some of the themes are richer than others. However, it is important to present all of them here, because even themes that do not offer a great deal of information can contribute to insights that are significant to the research.

Standardization and its results

The interviews indicated criticism of the way in which the education system operates. The parents claimed that the education system strived for learning standardization and was therefore unable to provide an individualized response to the children and to acknowledge the differences between various students regarding each of these parameters:

It's a structured process – the child is seen as another little screw in the system and has to listen to everything the teacher dictates and has to finish in the number of years planned. There's no room for the individual. I see it as a conveyor belt in a factory; it moves along, moves along, moves along. If anything falls off the conveyor belt – have you ever seen this? It falls and that's it, it's left on the side. There's no room for individuality; individuals fall. (2)

Yes, the system responds very specifically to the average kids, and those at the edges – whether they are very strong or very weak – get lost. (19)

In the parents' opinion, standardization stemmed from the fact that the teaching and learning processes in schools were based on standard external targets set by the education system and forced on the teachers. This standardization also stemmed from a lack of resources, which led to learning in classes with large numbers of students. In such conditions, individually adapted learning programs cannot be developed for each student.

And in talks that I had with the teacher ... she said, "What do you think, that I don't want to have fewer children, so I can adapt myself to their needs, to what they want? But the system says that by [the Jewish New Year] children need [to know] all the letters, and by Chanukah, children need to know how to read ... and I have to [make sure] that the children make this [deadline]. Otherwise they'll say 'what a lousy teacher.'"(1)

[A]nd I think that the system on the one hand cuts back the budgets because there isn't any money, and on the other hand, the conditions are very difficult. One teacher with 35 students – you can't really reach the child. (19)

According to the opinions of interviewees, this standardization created rigidity and coercive processes that were directed at the students. This standardization forced them to behave according to external dictates and to learn content that was uninteresting to them, in ways that were not suited to their needs.

I think it's a type of jail. They tell you: "now you will sit here for five hours, then you'll go out when we tell you to and you will eat when we tell you to. You can do that when we give you permission to do so. Talk only [when] we agree that you can, and we will tell you what to learn. We will tell you what is supposedly of interest to you, even though we are not interested in what's of interest to you." (14)

In addition, standardization causes students to act in ways that contradict their needs and natural desires, such as sitting for an extended period without talking or moving around.

I believe that this is many hours to sit in school. (4)

Neglecting education in favor of learning

Interviewees indicated that the education system was concerned with teaching and learning content, and not with teaching and encouraging other important skills, such as creativity. One of the interviewees noted that her child lost his creativity when he began to attend school, and this led her to remove him from the education system.

He is super creative, he draws at a very, very, very high level today, too. As soon as he started going to school everything disappeared. He hardly had any friends he stopped drawing, he stopped creating, he stopped being creative, he really was simply extinguished, and this [happened] right in front of our eyes. (13)

School climate

In the interviews the school climate was criticized from both social and learning aspects. Parents claimed that the school climate did not correspond with what they considered to be the desirable social and educational climate. The unsuitable climate was evident in both teacher–student relationships and in relationships among the students themselves.

According to the parents, teachers in the school spent much of their time imposing discipline using disrespectful behavior and shouting at the students. Furthermore, they claimed that interactions among the students were tainted with a lack of respect, competitiveness (particularly regarding the manner in which the evaluation process of learning outcomes was implemented), and violence.

Children who curse and children who treat each other with zero respect, that don't care about each other, who see everything is a matter of control, power and authority and of being stronger and bigger than the others. (19)

Another reason that we didn't go to school is that there they very clearly encourage competitiveness grades, which in my opinion are absolutely unnecessary. There is no need for grades; if our goal is the development of each child, each child has different skills of his own. (7)

As they saw it, this climate generated a situation where the students were primarily concerned with survival in the school, and were not receptive to learning or to developing proper social relationships.

Here it's survival. You send a child to school; it is survival. (20)

The interviews also indicate that the students experienced alienation, they disconnected from the teaching and learning in the classroom, and even caused disciplinary problems

Most of the time the children sit on chairs in the classroom. They are expected to be relatively quiet which is of course difficult for them to be for so many hours. You often see that even those who are quiet often you see that they are quiet but they are not with you. They won't make any noise, there are lots of those who won't make any noise but they, they are not really there. And there are those who really do make a noise and who are bored so them, which makes the teacher suffer. (10)

Quality of teaching and learning processes

Interviews indicate that the parents believed the education system provided poor quality teaching and learning processes which led to educational mediocrity. The inferior quality of teaching and learning processes was, in the opinion of the interviewees, manifested in the following ways:

Learning emphasized memorizing knowledge rather than understanding it or applying any high-order thinking skills.

[T]hese types [of students] that give the correct answers but if you just ask them any sort of question, a question that is just a little bit different, they don't know the answer, they don't understand. (10)

The teaching methods used in the schools were outdated and include frontal learning, sparse use of under-developed technology and minimal peer learning.

[A]nd as long as the system still teaches frontally, the teachers are behind the times ... You shouldn't misunderstand this; I have great, great respect for teachers but I don't think that they can develop professionally at all, because they are constantly stuck with the problems that are relevant to the [education] system not to the children and not to the teaching staff. (29)

[I]t's a terribly big system I thought that even with the technological revolution that we are undergoing, by the time the education system is updated and begins to use something technological, it will be at least seven years. Then the education system will bring in something huge in terms of technology. (22)

Only a small amount of time (from the total time spent in the school) was actually dedicated to learning.

[The teachers] really want to utilize the time, as much as possible, long days until 3 [o'clock] learning like this But in reality the amount of time that they produce learning is terribly negligible ... they learn math four hours per week, it seems a lot, ... and then it turns out that four hours is not actually four hours, it's 45 minutes each lesson. Shorten the 45 minutes by 10 minutes because by the time you actually start and finish, you deduct 10 minutes if not more the pace is terribly, terribly slow because you need to explain things, it's enough that someone doesn't understand or there's a disruption. This means that in a week they study a total of 1.5-2 hours – half the time, see? And this is a best-case scenario. (10)

A key reason for inferior quality teaching and learning processes is the inferior quality of teachers in the schools. One of the interviewees even noted that in today's society, the low status of the teachers has contributed to keeping top-quality people away from the teaching profession.

[W]hat teachers were like here 30 years ago – there's simply nothing like it any more. All the top-quality [teachers] have retired already. There aren't many tolerant and top-quality educators around who truly want to teach the next generation. (20)

I think that on the one hand, the system does not treat the teachers very favorably ... I think that if the education system treated its teachers a little more favorably, there would be more people with ideology and vision, top-quality people and fewer people who want to be in the education system because of the two-month annual vacation in July and August, which is really great if you have children [of your own]. (19)

Parents noted that attempts to fix what needs fixing in the education system and implement quality learning and teaching had not succeeded.

[B]ut what has really changed for me is the understanding that the people there [in the education system] really do have good intentions, but they don't have any chance of succeeding in the conditions as they are today; the system has no chance of succeeding, in my opinion. (1)

Given that schools did not create good-quality teaching and learning processes, time spent in school was reduced to "babysitting."

But school in its present form, where there is one teacher with 30 to 40 students, is not a place that enables anything like learning ... it doesn't matter what learning, like even social learning ... it is not a place where it is possible to learn; it is a place for survival. It is primarily a convenient babysitter. (13)

Irrelevance of the education system to the student's world

Parents noted that, in their opinion, the education system was operating without any real connection with the outside world, and was not relevant to the students' world.

The first thing that comes to mind is a dinosaur that is becoming extinct. The education system is simply this. It is a structure that is so big and cumbersome that it will take decades for it to change. The structure of the education system was established 150 years ago, which is not relevant to today. It does not suit today's lifestyle um it exists and is based on attitudes that are ... not correct, not up-to-date. (7)

Now with matriculation it is especially striking. They are teaching them things that are interesting aspects, but what is the connection to what they need to know? The whole school seems to me like a ritualistic ceremony of doing all sorts of things that have no significance beyond the simply ritualistic significance. This is not connected to their lives. You really see the children coming back and the things that are being done at school are not connected to their life, so in my opinion, this is a ritual that we are all doing. (26)

The lack of relevance was manifested in a number of ways: separating children from the adult world and also dividing the school according to age (as opposed to current approaches that

supported learning in multiple-age groups, long-life learning, and blurring the separation between adult and child).

The division by age bothers me a lot. In my opinion, the division into classes is an injustice, a multi-year injustice, for a lifetime, like people of the same age are in a classroom for so many hours. It's simply terrible; there are so many children that would be happy to be with children who are older or younger than them. (8)

I think that at the deepest level the goal of the school is to firstly distance the children from the adult world and to brainwash them, and that is a very big problem. (19)

Learning different disciplines separately (as opposed to current thinking which promotes interdisciplinary learning)

It's a shame because you can learn a lot from a teacher or any person, but sitting and reading me a book from start to finish over a whole year just to reduce the field they are teaching ... In other words, if it's history, you study only a specific period, and if it's biology, so only certain material, like to reducing areas of interest so much ... I think it is so much more effective to open the material, to open the exercise book, to open the area of interest. It's simply a waste. (8)

Theoretical, not practical learning (as opposed to current thinking which promotes experiential learning)

A shift to theoretical and not practical learning is many times something that is cut off from life. There's no connection to what you learned about the cat now in the classroom and living with the cat, seeing it, raising the cat. That is learning that is cut off from the celebration. (10)

Moving at a slow pace

Yes this system is so cumbersome and huge and bureaucratic that by the time something is updated, it will no longer be relevant. I even see this in myself I'm just mother to a couple of kids and by the time I understand something and have learned the lesson it's no longer relevant because it has already passed and with the next kid it will be different. So a system as huge as this simply has no chance. (22)

The education system's loss of goals

One of the interviewees noted that the education system had lost sight of its goals and that today its operation was now motivated by financial rather than educational considerations.

I think that over the years the [education] system has lost sight of itself and its goals and its goals at the moment are more financial – to save on the budget and they do not see the kid. (19)

In the deductive stage, the abovementioned reasons were divided into three main categories: goals, performance, and results (as outlined in the Introduction). The purpose of this stage was to examine the possible congruence between characteristics of the education crisis and reasons given by interviewees for choosing not to send their children to school. The results of the second stage are presented in [Table 2](#).

As the table shows, the reasons cited by the parents for choosing homeschooling largely correspond with the characteristics of the educational crisis. The significance of the results of this analysis are presented in the Discussion.

Table 2. Correlation between education crisis characteristics and interviewee reasons for choosing homeschooling.

	Education crisis characteristics	Reasons for homeschooling choice
Goals	Lack of goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education System lost sight of its goals
Performance	Lack of agreement about goals	
	Poor quality teaching and learning processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undesirable social/educational climate in school • Teachers in school spend major part of their time imposing discipline • Pupils are concerned primarily with survival • Education towards mediocrity • Small amount of time dedicated to actual learning • Time spent in school is limited to babysitting • Pupils subjected to inflexible attitudes and coercive processes
	Knowledge rather than high-order thinking skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning emphasizes repetition of knowledge and not understanding or higher-order thinking skills • Education system deals with teaching and learning contents and does not deal with education or encouraging development of other important skills
	Teaching methods not relevant to reality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdated teaching methods
	Activities and curriculum not relevant to reality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education system operates without a real connection to the real world, and is not relevant to the world of the pupils • The school functions at a slow pace in comparison to the real world • The children are separated from the adult world • The school separates the children according to age • Separation between the different disciplines during the learning • Theoretical rather than practical learning
Results	Standardized activities – not adapted to pupil needs and desires	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education system strives for standardization of place, time, content, and processes of learning and is therefore unable to provide a response individually tailored to the pupil or to take into account their differences • Pupils operate in ways that are contradictory to their needs
	Teacher burnout, dropout and decreased quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor quality of teachers in schools • Low status of teachers in society
	Decreased scholastic achievements	
	Increased incidence of violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships between pupils are marred by a lack of respect, competitiveness, and violence
	Pupil alienation from school and teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils experience alienation, withdrawal from the teaching and learning process in the classroom, and even cause disciplinary problems
	Pupil dropout from school	

Discussion and conclusions

Reasons for choosing homeschooling and characteristics of the educational crisis

As mentioned above, in the present study, parents who chose to homeschool in Israel were interviewed. In keeping with the phenomenological approach, the purpose of the open interviews was to examine how the interviewees explained their choice of homeschooling. Accordingly, neither the questions nor the analysis were expected to describe the “actual” reality; instead, they were intended to capture how the interviewees perceived the situation at the time of the interview. Therefore, their construction of the reasons for their choice of homeschooling was very important. Their perceptions of the situation were examined and compared to the characteristics of the education crisis described in the Introduction.

Accordingly, the data was analyzed in two stages. The first was the inductive stage, in which the interviews were analyzed to identify the reasons behind the parents’ choice to homeschool.

This stage generated a long list of reasons, which were then divided into categories. These categories are presented in the Results section.

The second stage was the deductive stage. As described in Table 2, it included grouping of the categories identified in the first stage of analysis into three broader categories, as well as subcategories, according to the characteristics of the education crisis, goals, implementation, and results.

Table 2 summarizes the correspondence between the characteristics of the education crisis and the reasons for choosing to homeschool that were cited by the interviewees. The right-hand column lists the reasons for choosing to homeschool revealed during the inductive process of this study; the left-hand column lists the education crisis characteristics that were outlined at the beginning of this article. The correlations between the left- and right-hand columns represent the results of the deductive process.

As the table shows, the reasons that motivated people to choose homeschooling correspond to a great extent with the characteristics of the education crisis. At the level of goals, the characteristics of the education crisis include loss of goals and lack of agreement about goals (Aviram, 1996, 2010; Biesta, 2009; Rothstein & Jacobsen, 2006). It is interesting to note that only one of the reasons mentioned by the interviewees corresponds with the characteristics associated with goals. Only one interviewee noted that in her opinion the education system had lost sight of its goals.

The majority of reasons mentioned by the parents that corresponded with characteristics of the education crisis referred to performance, poor-quality teaching and learning processes, knowledge acquisition rather than developing thinking skills (Aviram, 2010; Prensky, 2011; Wagner, 2010), teaching methods and content that are not relevant to reality, standardized activities that are not adapted to the students' needs, teacher burnout, increased teacher dropout rates, and decreased teacher quality in schools (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Dworkin, 1987; Hultell et al., 2013; O'Reilly, 2005; Vandenbergh & Huberman, 1999). This might suggest that parents considered reasons for homeschooling in keeping with the constructivist paradigm, seeking up-to-date, authentic learning processes and teaching methods that are relevant to the learners and adapted to their needs.

Parents mentioned various aspects of the claims about poor quality teaching and learning processes in the schools. They also noted that knowledge that is irrelevant to the reality in which we live was taught in schools, using outdated teaching methods. Furthermore, they claimed that the education system operated in a standardized manner rather than catering to the children's individual needs, and that the quality of the teachers was poor.

Some of the reasons noted by parents are congruent with education crisis characteristics found in the literature, which include decreased scholastic achievement (Peterson, 2003; Ryan, 2013; Teasdale & Owen, 2005) or increased incidence of violence (Benbenishty, 2005; Flannery et al., 2004; Kohn, 1999; Lawrence, 1997; Peguero, 2011), student alienation from the school and teachers (Aviram, 2010; Calabrese & Seldin, 1986; Huling, 1980; Kohn, 1999), and student dropout from the school system (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991; Rumberger, 2011; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Parents interviewed for this study noted the violent relationships between the students and their lack of respect for each other, as well as their alienation and withdrawal from the learning process.

None of the interviewees suggested that their decision to homeschool had been motivated by external factors of necessity (such as illness, bullying, or the like) or, in Morton's (2010) terms, as a last resort. The reasons cited were associated with educational views or aspects of the post-modern condition. It is also interesting that none of the interviewees explicitly used the term "education crisis." The parents noted reasons associated with problems of the education system, without using this term.

Thus, the consideration of diverse difficulties associated with the concept of the education crisis was part of the analytical process of the research, which examined the congruence of the

parents' retrospective perceptions of the situation with the theory of the education crisis. Indeed, it emerged that their claims did correspond with some aspects of the concept of education crisis. This may indicate that even without conceptualizing it, they were responding to the education crisis. The findings of earlier research (Neuman, 2018), revealed that one of the central reasons for choosing to homeschool was criticism of the education system. Therefore, the present research focused on this reason, rather than others that the parents mentioned. This focus was intended to promote deeper understanding of this specific group of reasons.

Retrospective perceptions might not describe things as they actually were at the time of choosing to homeschool. However, these perceptions are important, as they represent a model of the parents' thinking regarding this subject. As such, they can help understand their perceptions of the choice and its significance (on this subject, see also Spiegler, 2010).

It is interesting to note, as mentioned above, that the majority of reasons parents mentioned for choosing to homeschool were performance-related, while a small number were result-related, and only one reason was goal-related. One possible explanation for this relates to a key characteristic in the education crisis: the education system has lost sight of its goals. An education system that functions without goals is liable to produce complex performance processes which, because they are not directly linked to the goals, will have little significance or meaning, as well as outcomes that not connected to the goals. This implies that the system will be primarily concerned with performance processes and less concerned with goals or results.

Another explanation could be that the interviewees did not acknowledge that the education system had lost sight of its goals. Instead they believed that the education system did in fact have goals. However, they were not in agreement with the education system about the manner in which these goals could be achieved, in other words, about the performance.

Homeschooling as a solution to the education crisis

In the introduction to this article, two categories of solutions to the education problems were described, solutions within the education system and solutions outside the education system. According to the findings (see Table 1), the reasons that motivated the participants in this research to choose homeschooling correspond with the characteristics of the education crisis characteristics. It might therefore be argued that those who chose homeschooling did so, at least partially, in response to what they perceived as the education crisis.

This suggests that homeschooling can be considered a solution to the education crisis. Furthermore, it might also be suggested that homeschooling is, in fact, a solution that is not included in either of the two categories described (within or outside the education system), but rather constitutes a unique third category of solutions to the education crisis, which might be called "abandoning the education system."

These three categories actually describe dissatisfaction of parents and stakeholders with the existing education system and an effort to find alternatives. Isenberg (2007) coined the term "ideology of parentocracy," to describe the third wave in the sociohistorical development of education in England, the United States, and other countries. According to his characterization, in this wave children's education was designed according to the abilities and desires of their parents (not the children themselves or the state).

Gutmann (1978) described three alternative responses to the question of who determines the what and how of educating. According to the first alternative, the "family state," the state decides about these issues. According to the second alternative, the "state of individuals," the students make the decisions. According to the third alternative, "the state of families," the power lies with the parents. These three categories derive from involvement of parents in their children's education; thus, they are associated with Isenberg's (2007) third wave, or Gutmann's (1978) state of families.

However, the third category is the most extreme of the three. In all three cases, parents seek alternatives for their children's education, but the third option involves total abandonment of the education system. Supporters of this third category recognize the serious problems of the education system. However, unlike advocates of solutions from the first two categories, they assume that it is impossible to change the existing education system. Furthermore, the members of this group believe that establishing alternative education systems cannot resolve the current education problems, and that the idea of learning within any education system framework (traditional or alternative) should be abandoned completely.

Thus, it can be argued that there are three categories of solutions to the education crisis: solutions within the education system, solutions outside the education system, and abandoning the education system. This distinction could be important for three main reasons. The first is related to the importance of homeschooling in the overall education setting. If the education crisis continues to intensify, as it has done for several decades, it can be expected that stakeholder dissatisfaction with the current situation, as well their ongoing search for solutions, will increase. Growing numbers of stakeholders will seek solutions to their dissatisfaction with the education system, and it is reasonable to expect that the increase in the number of people selecting various solutions for the education crisis will occur within the existing education system (Category 1), outside the existing education system and within the framework of alternative education systems (Category 2), and in abandoning the education system (Category 3 – homeschooling).

Indeed, insofar as one can deduce the future based on trends of the past and based on the steady growth in the homeschooling in the western world over recent decades, the number of those who choose to abandon the education system can be expected to increase. This calls for preparation at national level; the ramifications on society of an ever-increasing number of young people studying at home rather than in the education system are likely to be extensive.

The second reason is related to the educational solutions available to homeschoolers. Theoretically, if the decision to homeschool is seen as part of Category 2, it is reasonable to expect that if society succeeds in building a better education system than the current one, homeschoolers will go back to sending their children to the (new and better) education system. However, if homeschooling is considered a separate, third category in which any education system is seen as an undesirable option for educating children, even if society does build better education systems, many homeschoolers will continue on their chosen path and not send their children to the education system.

A considerable portion of the reasons parents cited in their interviews involved dissatisfaction with the education system; this could reflect sharp social criticism of society as incapable of creating suitable, worthy educational institutions. It then follows that parents must assume full responsibility for educating their children, and not outsource this important aspect of shaping their children, in particular, and the future, in general.

The association of homeschooling with the third category suggests that the education system is being abandoned as the result of an assumption that it isn't worthwhile to try to introduce changes into the education system, or develop alternative educational institutions. It is interesting to note that the reactions to the education crisis vary: while some parents choose to continue to send their children to school, others choose to abandon the schools. This might be associated with different reasons, such as parents' past experience in schools or availability of alternative schools in the immediate area of the family. In future research, it would be interesting investigate the factors that evoke response of the third category – abandoning the education system.

The third point refers to those planning educational reforms. Recognition of homeschooling as a third category, characterized by abandoning the education system, is likely to be important for policymakers and for educators who plan reforms in the education system.

Understanding the phenomenon of homeschooling can help these people better understand the homeschoolers' dissatisfaction with the education system, and to plan reforms that address

these dissatisfactions – in other words, not only changing the current education system (according to Category 1) or building alternative education systems (according to Category 2), but also offering educational alternatives that are not in the education system framework at all (according to Category 3). For example, they could develop a dialog between the education system and those who are abandoning it, and actually create a system that is capable of finding different ways to include those who have abandoned it (such as offering education programs specifically for homeschoolers). Such a bridge between the education system and those who choose to abandon it could be important, given the expectation that the number of homeschooled children will continue to increase. It could help maintain some level of similarity between the education delivered by the formal education system and that provided outside this system.

Limitations of the research

The research described in this article has a number of limitations. First, this article addresses homeschooling in a general context, with reference to the western world as a whole. However, the research presented here is limited and is based on homeschooling families in one country only – Israel. The scientific literature indicates that parents in different countries in the western world choose to homeschool for similar reasons to those mentioned here; nevertheless, it would be interesting to conduct a study similar to the one described here in other countries, in order to confirm the arguments raised here.

The division described in this article can be understood as three points along an axis of responses to the education crisis, within and outside of the education system. This may help generalize the research findings to other countries, where a dichotomous division into three categories is unsuitable. For example, in some eastern European countries, it might be more correct to describe these categories along a continuum, because homeschooled children in those countries are enrolled in schools, as *de jure* school students. They are individually educated but have to follow the school curricula, and their educational outcomes are regularly examined by schools.

Another limitation of the study is that the participants were parents who had been homeschooling for a number of years, but they were asked to discuss the reasons they had chosen to homeschool. It is also important to examine the reasons for choosing homeschooling among parents who have only recently made this choice, because it is likely that after several years, parents restructure the reasons that led them to the choice to homeschool. In the present research, the parents were not asked which other educational alternatives they had considered in addition to homeschooling. In future research it would be interesting to collect such data and examine whether there is a correlation between the reasons for choosing homeschooling and the other educational alternatives considered by parents.

Furthermore, this study addressed the differences between three categories, but was based on information gathered only from the third category. It would be interesting to gather information from the other two categories in order to establish additional differences between the three categories.

Another interesting aspect of the present research is that all the interviewees were women. This was decided because in the large majority of cases in Israel, it is the mother who carries out homeschooling (Neuman & Guterman, 2013). Furthermore, other studies have also indicated the importance and complexity of the mother's role in homeschooling, and found that the significant adult who carries out homeschooling is most often the mother (see, e.g., Jackson & Allan, 2010; Lois, 2013). However, interviews with fathers might have raised different reasons; thus it would be interesting in future research to examine this.

Despite these limitations, this article offers a conceptual contribution to the study of homeschooling, by presenting it as one of the possible solutions to the various problems of the

education system and by suggesting that it represents a unique third category of solutions (and not part of the other two categories).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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