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## "We had time for ourselves" – Israeli Homeschooling Graduates Talk About Their Learning and Activities in Homeschooling

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### Abstract

This study focuses on the homeschooling experiences of Israeli homeschool graduates. The phenomenon of homeschooling has been evolving in recent years as more and more parents choose to educate their children at home. In the world, and also in Israel, many studies have been conducted on homeschooling, but in Israel no research has been conducted on homeschooling graduates. Homeschooling is a relatively new phenomenon in Israel and only in recent years has a significant group of graduates been formed. This qualitative, phenomenological study focused on Israeli homeschooling graduates who had reached the age of eighteen and studied most of their elementary and high school years at home. Using semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 15 homeschooling graduates, the study sought to understand how homeschooling graduates spent their time in childhood and adolescence, the educational approach used in their homes, and their perceptions of their learning experiences. The findings uniquely detail homeschooling from the perspective of homeschooling graduates and interpret them in light of intrinsic motivation theories. The parents' and homeschool graduates' educational approaches and attitudes fostered children's intrinsic motivation to learn.

### Keywords

homeschooling graduate, learning, intrinsic motivation, phenomenological research

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## **"We had time for ourselves" – Israeli Homeschooling Graduates Talk About Their Learning and Activities in Homeschooling**

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This study focuses on the homeschooling experiences of Israeli homeschool graduates. The phenomenon of homeschooling has been evolving in recent years as more and more parents choose to educate their children at home. In the world, and also in Israel, many studies have been conducted on homeschooling, but in Israel no research has been conducted on homeschooling graduates. Homeschooling is a relatively new phenomenon in Israel and only in recent years has a significant group of graduates been formed. This qualitative, phenomenological study focused on Israeli homeschooling graduates who had reached the age of eighteen and studied most of their elementary and high school years at home. Using semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 15 homeschooling graduates, the study sought to understand how homeschooling graduates spent their time in childhood and adolescence, the educational approach used in their homes, and their perceptions of their learning experiences. The findings uniquely detail homeschooling from the perspective of homeschooling graduates and interpret them in light of intrinsic motivation theories. The parents' and homeschool graduates' educational approaches and attitudes fostered children's intrinsic motivation to learn.

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Homeschooling is a term that refers to a phenomenon in which parents choose to take full responsibility for their children's education, rather than share it with the state. The homeschooling movement was a small and marginal movement at the end of the last century, but in recent decades it has grown significantly (Apple, 2011; Edri, 2016; Lois, 2017). The homeschooling movement in the United States is the largest in the world, and in 2016 it was estimated that 2.3 million children attended homeschooling (Ray, 2018).

At the end of the previous millennium, homeschooling families in Israel numbered in the dozens (Heller-Degani, 2003). The past decade has seen a significant increase, with a tangible rise in applications to the Ministry of Education, from 70 approved requests in 2004, to 168 in 2007 (Knesset, 2007). In 2014, these numbers rose to 448 approvals (Knesset, 2014). In the 2009-2010 school year, 1,150 students were educated at home (Detel, 2018). These numbers do not accurately reflect the number of children studying in homeschooling because there are likely many children who are educated at home without a permit (Edri, 2016). Despite the growth in the number of homeschooled children, it is worth noting that this is still a relatively negligible phenomenon in Israel - only 0.5 percent of Israeli children are educated at home (Gretel, 2019).

There are two main approaches to schooling children at home. The first is called “homeschooling.” In this approach children learn at home similar to the way they learn in school in terms of school hours, teaching methods, learning materials, etc. The second approach is called “unschooling.” In this approach the child is fully responsible for his or her learning and s/he decides whether to learn, what content to learn, when, and how. The role of the parent is to provide the child with what is required for learning but nothing beyond that (Nueman & Guterman, 2016; O’Hare & Coyne, 2020). These two approaches are conceptually at opposite ends of the homeschool spectrum, but in fact most families combine them (Edri & Dahan Kalev, 2018; Finch, 2012). The differences between the approaches are not only in the content and approaches of learning but mainly in terms of the responsibility for learning. In the first approach the responsibility is on the parent, while in the second approach the responsibility is on the child (Edri & Dahan Kalev, 2018).

### **Homeschooling Graduates**

There are many studies on the achievements of children while they are being homeschooled, but few studies on homeschooling graduates in academia (Snyder, 2013). In Israel, the issue has not been researched at all because it is a young population and a relatively new phenomenon, so only in recent years has a significant group of homeschooling graduates been created that can be researched.

In the United States, Snyder (2013) examined the average grades of three groups in the college where he teaches: homeschooling, Catholic education, and public education. Study participants included all 408 first-year undergraduate students at the college. Of these, 137 were graduates of public education, 142 were graduates of Catholic education, and 129 were graduates of homeschooling. In college entrance exams (SAT or ACT), the group with the highest average was the homeschooling graduate group. The grade point average (GPA), which includes the average grade of students in all subjects studied at the college (including courses in general education, core courses, and specific courses of the subject) was also highest among the homeschooling group.

Watson (2019) examined the GPA of a conservative Christian college in the southeastern United States. Its study population included 308 students, half of whom were homeschooling graduates. The data showed that homeschooling graduates earned a GPA that was higher than students who attended other types of schools.

Wilkens and colleagues (Wilkens et al., 2015) examined scores of 10,492 students enrolled in math studies in higher education, of whom 190 were students in homeschooling most of their high school years. The researchers found that homeschooling graduates received similar math scores on SAT tests and higher scores on math studies in academia.

In Soufleris' (2014) qualitative doctoral dissertation, he interviewed 25 homeschool graduates and 25 high school graduates who attended the same university. As part of his research, he examined the shared living experience in college dormitories of homeschooling graduates and found that homeschooling students have well-developed skills, social exposure, and the ability to successfully move to a university residential environment.

Elliott's (2019) doctoral dissertation used a phenomenological approach. The data were collected in three ways (triangulation): in the first phase interviews with 14 homeschooling students, in the second phase focus groups, and in the third phase document analysis (after the interview, participants were asked to write a two-page letter to a new student in homeschooling). The study found that participants felt ready for college because they were studying independently and because they possessed critical thinking skills.

Gaither (2017), in a recent review article on homeschooling, summarized the findings of the literature on various topics including the transition to adulthood. Gaither limited

himself in this article to homeschooling in the United States and to the following topics: the history of homeschooling, demographics, academic achievement, and the transition to college. He noted one of the main topics in the literature on homeschooling and higher education is admission to institutions of higher learning. Most of the literature on the subject is quantitative and consists of surveys of acceptance officers. The findings are that homeschool graduates are accepted at a rate similar to school graduates, and also that the admissions team expects homeschool graduates to be as successful as school graduates (Duggan, 2010; Gloeckner & Jones, 2013; Haan & Cruickshank, 2006; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004b; Sorey & Duggan, 2008 in Gaither, 2017). Gaither (2017) argued that Ray's study (Ray, 2004a in Gaither, 2017) is the most cited study on the subject. Ray sent a survey to 7,306 homeschooling graduates, almost all of whom are evangelical Christians. Consistent with other research, Ray found homeschooled students were more educated than the national average, voted at high rates, had a positive view of their homeschooling experience, and were productive members of society.

Gaither also cited studies that present a less rosy picture than that which emerged from Ray's research (Ray, 2004a in Gaither, 2017). For example, in Pennings' surveys (Pennings et al., 2011; Pennings et al., 2014 in Gaither, 2017), a random sample was used to examine the lives of religious young people aged 24-39 who attended homeschooling in high school. In the polls, these young people were compared to Protestant, Catholic, and public-school graduates. Homeschooling graduates in this sample had a spiritual life similar to Protestant school graduates, but they married younger, had fewer children, and divorced more frequently than graduates in other groups, even when controlling for background variables. Homeschooling graduates reported lower SAT scores, studied in less selective colleges for less time, and reported at higher rates feelings of helplessness about life and lack of goals and direction. Hill and Den Dulk (2013, in Gaither, 2017) used NSYR data to estimate the impact of homeschooling on civic engagement and volunteering. In the study, they found that homeschooling graduates were engaged in significantly less volunteer activity than graduates of a public or private religious school.

In this literature review, we see how the graduates of homeschooling fit into adult life and what achievements they reach, but in order to understand where they are now, we must first understand the homeschooling they received and, most importantly, how they experienced it. In the current article, we will describe the lives of homeschool graduates including where the participants are today (education and marital status) and how they view their childhood in the context of the homeschooling they received, focusing on their activities and learning. Due to the importance of internal motivation for learning and a person's mental well-being, we examined the characteristics of learning described by the homeschooling graduates in light of the components of internal motivation.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theory of self-determination (SDT) deals mainly with social conditions that facilitate or inhibit the flourishing of humans. The theory examines how biological, social, and cultural factors enhance or undermine human capacity for growth, involvement, and mental well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to self-determination theory there are three innate psychological needs – competence, autonomy, and relatedness – which, when satisfied, yield self-motivation and improved mental health, and when frustrated, lead to reduced motivation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Based on self-determination theory, Assor (2016) argues that students' lack of motivation and avoidance of challenging tasks is as a result of their experience of these issues as threatening three basic psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

Assor (2012) presents a review of articles that indicate that students are less and less engaged in learning as they get older. Assor argues, based on self-determination theory, that there is a link between motivation for learning and involvement in learning and the need for autonomy – that is, because school learning does not support the need for autonomy, students are not driven or involved in learning. Assor distinguishes between motivation that is experienced as non-autonomous (and therefore full of stress and not optimal) and motivation that is experienced as autonomous (stems from the person's true self and therefore leads to full involvement and mental well-being). According to him, one of the key elements in the need for autonomy is to be free from coercion and to have the option to choose your activities.

Researchers of homeschooling have argued that homeschooling has components that are appropriate for developing intrinsic motivation. However, only a few studies have examined internal academic motivation in homeschooling (Medlin & Butler, 2018). A study by Medlin and Blackmer (2000) examined 96 children from three settings: homeschooling, a school that gives assessment through grades, and a school that gives assessment through a portfolio instead of grades. The hypothesis was that there would be differences in internal motivation between homeschooled children and school children, in favor of homeschooled children. But the findings were not unequivocal. Children in homeschooling had higher intrinsic motivation in reading and had lower intrinsic motivation in math than children who went to a school that gave grades. Also, no differences in intrinsic motivation were found between homeschooled children and children going to schools that give assessments through a portfolio. Riley (2016) presented the findings of her study, that young people in homeschooling felt higher levels of competence and autonomy in relation to their peers in school education, but regarding the third need – relatedness – no differences were found between homeschooling and school education.

Dewey (1962 in Noddings, 2012) argued that when students are forced to study learning material with which they have no real contact and no clear purpose, they lose interest in the material and their confidence in themselves. They are content with giving answers and receiving a confirming answer from their teachers. They give up the belief that education has some connection to the construction of personal meaning (Noddings, 2012). The learning described by the interviewees is the exact opposite – learning out of choice, learning out of need and purpose, or learning out of interest. The homeschooling described by the interviewees is basically consistent with the effective form of learning that Dewey described.

The purpose of the study was to examine how homeschooling graduates view the education they received, focusing on the learning and activities. The research question is: how do homeschooling graduates perceive their learning experience during the homeschooling period?

## **Methodology**

### **The Research Approach**

This is a qualitative study based on the phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is the study of the meaning of phenomena in the social world from the worldview of those who experience them. Phenomenology is based on the assumption that human life experiences are a central source of knowledge and the creation of reality. From this, phenomenological research traces the meaning of things for humankind (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Phenomenological research offers fascinating insights into the meaning of everyday life and professional occupation. Phenomenological research calls us to wonder and ponder

about joy, loss, worry, love, connection, and all kinds of deep human experiences. In a world that is becoming increasingly material and commercial, phenomenological research provides an opening for understanding human existence (Adams & Van Manen, 2017).

Phenomenological research comes to describe the essence of the phenomenon by revealing the perspective of those who experience it, in order to understand the meaning that the participants attribute to the phenomenon. The results of this study contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon of learning in the particularity of the homeschooling context (Teherani et al., 2015). As we are interested in the perspectives of those who experienced homeschooling, the phenomenological approach is appropriate.

Among the subtypes of phenomenological research, the subtype we adopt is the hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenological approach. Ontologically, this approach sees experience as an interpretive process located in the world of the individual. Epistemologically, the researcher is part of the world and understands the phenomenon through interpretation; the researcher experiences the experience of the interviewee while at the same time experiencing his or her own experience (Neubauer et al, 2019). In the current study I experience the experience of the interviewees through their eyes and at the same time through my eyes as a homeschooling mother.

### **My Place as a Researcher - Reflection**

I am a mother of homeschooled children aged 8-18. I have been researching the subject of homeschooling for many years, first in my master's thesis, then in my doctoral dissertation, and now as part of a post-doctoral study. During the study I was moved by the inner motivation and learning experience presented by the learners. It is evident that they liked to learn and learned by choice. This made me wonder where I had been wrong in my approach to my own children's learning. When I dreamed of homeschooling as a young mother, I imagined learning out of meaning and the enjoyment of learning. In practice I often felt that my children were learning from reluctance. I was familiar with the unschooling approach but chose to combine the approaches and also obliged my children to some learning (though differently, of course, from school). My children could choose what to learn, how and with whom, but I did commit them to learning. The encounter with the homeschooling graduates made me wonder if I was wrong; if I should not have chosen the way of unschooling. I now believe (as I saw in the study) that children will eventually come to learning on their own.

A second point I noticed during the study was that the children largely followed the path of their parents. In a family where they did not value education and the parents were not educated, the interviewee also did not acquire an education. In a family that focused on agriculture, the child also chose to continue farming. In a family where the parents were high-tech people, the child also went towards computers. Studies show the importance of parental education in acquiring children's education, as we will see in the discussion section, and it may be even more significant in homeschooling. It is possible that the perception with which I came to the study that the home is very significant for the education of the children influenced the way I saw the subject and therefore it is important for me to note this.

### **The Study Participants**

The study involved 15 homeschooling graduates who were over the age of 18 and who have studied in homeschooling during most of their school years (from first to twelfth grade) and most of high school (ninth-twelfth). Because I was interested in understanding the experience of homeschooling graduates and their coping as graduates, it was important for

me to interview graduates who had spent a significant period in homeschooling, including their high school years.

The interviewees were aged 18-34, most of them (ten) aged 18-21, one aged 23, two aged 26 and two over the age of 30. The group of interviewees includes eleven men and four women. Five of them were married. Three of them had children of compulsory school age who were educated at home. All but one have completed a partial or full matriculation, started studies at the Open University for a bachelor's degree, or started certificate studies (conducting or film). One of them has completed a full matriculation and two are nearing completion of their undergraduate studies. Given their young age it is difficult at this stage to know who will complete a degree and acquire a profession.

All the interviewees are Israeli Jews and native Hebrew speakers. Some are religious. In Israel, there are educational institutions intended for religious Jews: some of the younger religious boys study in Talmud Torah, where most of the study is Torah, and some of the older religious boys study in yeshivas where most of the study is Gemara (the primary source of Jewish religious law). There are differences between religious yeshivas where core academic subjects are also studied, and ultra-Orthodox yeshivas where only Torah is studied, but in all yeshivas a lot of Gemara is studied. Religious girls also have unique frameworks, but these frameworks are not mentioned in the study, so I have not detailed them here. There are also many religious boys and girls who study in "state religious" schools which combine secular and religious studies.

## **Research Process**

In the first stage, I contacted friends and families I knew from my previous research and asked for the details of their adult children. In addition, I wrote on Facebook for homeschooling graduates that I knew virtually. In the second stage, I asked mothers I knew and homeschooling graduates I interviewed to refer me to other interviewees. Some of the names I received were without contact information, so I did a search through Google and Facebook to find contact information and contacted them. In total, I turned to 25 families. Fifteen graduates from 13 families agreed to participate in the study. Graduates from seven families did not answer or did not want to participate, graduates from four families did not meet the criteria and there was one graduate about whom I was debating, and in the end, I decided not to include this person.

## **Ethics**

Prior to conducting the study, I received the approval of the Ethics Committee of Mofet Institute (the higher education institute sponsoring my post-doctoral research). In the first stage of conducting the study, when I asked for the participation of the interviewees, I briefly explained to them about the study and asked for their consent to participate in it. Before conducting the interview, I sent them an informed consent form and asked them to sign it. At the beginning of the interview, I talked about the study again and invited them to ask me questions about it. While writing the study, I made sure to obscure the identity of the interviewees. After the publication of the article, I will send it to the interviewees out of gratitude and honoring our partnerships in conducting the research.

## **Research Tools**

The study used semi-structured in-depth interviews, aligned with the overall phenomenological approach. Prior to the interview, I contacted the participants and asked for



their consent to participate in the study. The interview itself is divided into three parts. In the first part I explained the research, in the second part I filled out a demographic details questionnaire, and in the third part I asked open-ended questions to understand the experience and worldview of the interviewees.

Phenomenological interviews sought to elicit how participants experienced their learning, including what they learned and how (Teherani et al., 2015). The interviews were designed to capture the experience of homeschooling for graduates, including how they see the way they learned and what their opinions are in regards to the education they received.

The current article is part of a larger study that aims to examine the experience of homeschooling graduates in various aspects, such as social interactions and military service, which is mandatory in Israel. These aspects are discussed in other article (in process). The questions presented here are those asked in the interview that relate to the topic of the current article:

- Tell me about yourself.
- As a child, what did you do all day at home? Can you describe a specific typical day for me?
- As a teenager, what did you do all day at home? Can you describe a specific typical day for me?
- Describe your educational situation over the years - what did you learn? How? Did you like to study?
- What are the benefits of homeschooling?
- What difficulties did you encounter as a result of being homeschooled?

### **Data Analysis**

After the interviews, I sent the recordings to a professional transcriber who transcribed the recordings. The data was analyzed using thematic content analysis (Karnieli, 2010), whereby I broke down the entire text into sections that I grouped under categories and created a focused description. Data analysis was done in six steps: firstly, I read the transcripts while listening to the recordings and made sure everything was transcribed correctly. Secondly, I read the transcripts and marked themes and sub-themes that came up. In the third step, I opened a file and wrote there the themes that came up with each interviewee. In the fourth stage I copied all the relevant quotes from all the interviews. In the fifth stage I wrote down next to each quotation the topics that appeared in it, and in the sixth stage I wrote the chapter of the findings, organized the chapter by themes, deleted unnecessary quotes, and added commentary.

### **Findings**

The findings chapter is made up of three parts. The first two parts refer to the activities and studies of homeschooling graduates during their time in homeschooling. In the first part we will see what they did at home in general. In the second part we will focus on their learning to understand how they learned in homeschooling from their point of view. In the third part we will examine their learning experience and how they see it looking back.

#### **Activities During the Homeschooling Period**

One of the key questions about homeschooling is what kids actually do all day if they do not go to school. Homeschooling graduates described a wide range of activities: studies,

classes, homeschooling sessions, homework, paid work, hobbies, volunteering, and so on. Activities vary from child to child, from environment to environment and from family to family and it is difficult to describe a particular structure of a daily framework that characterized all the families.

There were differences between childhood and adolescence in terms of how they spent their time. In childhood there are classes, homeschooling meetings, games with siblings, and time with parents. In the teenage years the activities turned in a different direction. Eli described a routine of time with parents and siblings, and meetings with friends. Yoni described computer games, dog care, capoeira (a kind of martial art that combines elements of dance, acrobatics, and music), and academic studies.

When I was a kid, I spent a lot of time with my parents. Mom was mostly at home every day, and I was with her and with my brothers, and we played and met friends, and we went to meetings and parks ... (Eli).

Getting up around 8-9, I had the dog to take care of, I had my computer games, there were chores at home, schooling a bit, afternoon capoeira. Even on days when there was no capoeira, I would train with my guys - we would meet. Such things mostly (Yoni).

In their teens, participants began to specialize in a particular field, do paid work, volunteer, start university studies, and meet with friends from distant places.

Around the age of 13-14 I wanted to progress a bit more. I always loved dogs ... I went to volunteer at the kennel ... and from there it just rolled. It started twice a week in the mornings, every morning, every day, all day, and it was really a second home for me, to start working there on Saturdays and being there with the guys. Whoever was there, they were always between two and four years above me - they were like my big brothers, and I studied the field there - that's mostly what I did. (Yoni).

I study driving about twice a week, I study at the Open University, so I see classes about twice a week, and read books, write notes, solve assignments, prepare for exams, I help with homework, meet with friends from the area in the afternoon, and that's it (Eli).

The fact that they do not go to school leaves them plenty of free time, which they can use as they wish and according to their understanding. Unlike school children, whose time is enslaved to other people's decisions, homeschooling children can choose their activities and actually decide what to do with their time.

I think because of homeschooling, I had a lot of time for all my hobbies that I invested a lot of time in, and I did different things at different times. I invested in them all day, and really enjoyed them, and now I know them very, very well. For example, I had a period where I loved to paint and painted all the time, and also with my friends I painted, and I painted a lot. I had a period where I did juggling, and I also went to classes, but at home I practiced 18 times more than I practiced in classes. And all sorts of other things (Eli).

## **The Ways of Learning in Homeschooling**

All interviewees described freedom from compulsory education or a very basic compulsory education that mainly included the core subjects: reading, English and arithmetic, and in religious families, also sacred studies. In the present section we will try to understand how they acquired the basics of reading, math, and English; later we will present the experience of their learning.

Reading is usually learned at a very young age; interviewees did not remember exactly how they learned. They remembered that they had not been taught to read in an orderly fashion and that they had simply learned it from the literate world around them and according to what interested them.

Reading, too, is everywhere. I do not remember how I actually learned before the age of six, like, it was early. But also, it was in the books and the books were interesting so I had to study to read them. (Eitan).

I do not remember the beginning of the reading. Oh, I remember a time when I would sit with books, decipher, and occasionally raise my head and ask about a word (Anna).

English was learned at a stage when the interviewees did remember the experience of learning. In English, teachers sometimes assisted, but mastery of English was acquired from personal experience in the language by reading books, watching movies, and playing computer games. Dan claims that he studied with teachers and Eitan describes studying with his mother, but for both of them, the significant exposure to the language was through experiencing it through reading books and watching movies.

I had English teachers along the way. I cannot say that I learned anything from them, they were not very good. In the end I learned English to a very, very high level also from reading books, I read a lot of books. So it may be that my speaking ability is not very, very high because I did not speak but my English ability is sufficient to read books, read articles, read articles now probably for a degree (Dan).

There was a neat study once my mom did for me in English, she taught me the basics of how to read the letters. After I knew the letters it went back to being informal, untidy (Eitan).

In mathematics you can see the difference between the interviewees. There are interviewees who loved math and grew up in a home where math is present, got into high level math, and took university courses, as opposed to interviewees who said they know only basic arithmetic – what it takes to get by in life, but not high math. Joshua and Ari claim that they have not studied mathematics but have knowledge of what they need in life, and what is theoretical is in any case irrelevant to their life.

I've not studied arithmetic since third grade. My parents taught me a little bit in third grade and that's it... A lot of my friends who studied a lot ... studied like twelve years of schooling, and to this day when they need calculations they don't know how, so I calculate. How can that be? I do not know, do not ask me. People - it seems to me that people who are in school, throw away

after that everything they have learned in the trash, and try to forget. For me, no - for me, learning is not a bad thing, it is a good thing. I remember it to this day. This is very surprising, but that's how it is. I did not come across exercises that I could not solve - exercises in reality, not something in theory (Joshua).

You know, an account of recipes and a grocery store - yes, I know that, because again ... it's something you use every day. Like, who uses the math of five units matriculation on a daily basis? (Ari).

Dan and Anna, on the other hand, invested in high-level mathematics and even took university courses on the subject. Their words indicate that the parents were also involved, whether through learning with them or simply their presence as people engaged in science.

My two parents are like that, so it's just the language spoken at home ... in high school there were about three courses at the Open University that I took in math, so it's a little more time I devoted to it. And that's it. Most of the years I did not study in an orderly fashion or did not devote much time to it. It's always like it's a topic that really excited me and there was something I just found, cool books I found at home and read like that, but no ... (Anna).

Mathematics. So at first Dad and Mom, like, up to the point that it was already too much for them and then I started studying with teachers. Later in college I had university level course in mathematics (Dan).

In general, it can be seen that the interviewees know what they need in life. Anyone who was not exposed to the English language, did not need it, did not see it as important, or whose parents did not see it as important did not know English. Whoever found it important to acquire English did so. So, too, for mathematics and general knowledge. In reading, everyone mastered it because everyone needed to master reading in the literate world in which they live.

In Anna's house, mathematics was present. For her, learning math is like learning a mother tongue; it's a part of life. The stories of the interviewees can be seen in the connection between the house in which they grew up and their knowledge and understanding. David describes how biology was present in the house where he grew up and Ari describes how his parents made the knowledge accessible to him because they are both educated people. It seems that the home was very significant to the education they acquired. This finding is backed by many studies that point to parental education as a significant predictor of children's education (Dobrin, 2015). Regarding science, interviewees related varying learning experiences.

I learned in bits, not something long. Biology- my mom has a master's degree in biology- so there is always such a thing as biology talk at home to understand terms and things like that (David).

I remember as a kid I really liked geography. I used to sit like that for hours on atlases and maps, and I think once upon a time I could tell you the capitals of all the countries in the world, and I would recognize all the flags. As if that was my thing. Ah ... so I remember, my parents would buy us school textbooks. And we would study in them whenever we wanted and be helped

by my parents- also my two parents are both educated people, so ah ... it was as if we had from whom to study at home (Ari).

### **The Learning Experience**

Many interviewees referred to learning out of desire and interest. Most of them described homeschooling in an unschooling approach or an approach close to it and claimed that they were not required to study, or that compulsory education was in very basic subjects like English, arithmetic, and reading. They argued that learning was out of desire and curiosity or understanding of the importance of the subject and without necessity. They described a passion for learning and learning by choice. Joshua describes his choice to study and his desire to study when he went to the yeshiva. Eitan also describes that he has a desire to learn precisely because they did not oblige him and did not make him tire of it.

I came to the yeshiva in the ninth grade - I came to study, I did not come because I had to go, I came because I wanted to study (Joshua).

All in all, I really feel that I am much more able to go and study areas as a result of this, and as a result I am also interested in areas that I might otherwise be tired of if I had been pressured to learn them (Eitan).

Ami and Ari explain that the learning experience in homeschooling is much better precisely because there is no obligation and no punishment; the learning is done at the child's initiative and at his or her will.

I think the experience of learning and how learning is treated is much better in homeschooling. When learning does not come from a place of punishment, but from a place where the child loves it or the parent loves it It's something you can enjoy and it's something you do because you want to. And I think it's something you save for life even after you leave home. (Ami).

What are the benefits? Wow, there are so many, it seems to me. First of all... I think every time I learn, then it's learning that is more real, because I see that there are people, again, that because they were forced to learn all sorts of things there is not so much left, uh ... I think in the academic context, it's like there's some curiosity that still exists, more than other people (Ari).

Joshua argues that homeschooling is more accurate and tailored and therefore also much more effective than school learning. At home his amount of learning was higher than what they learned in Talmud Torah.

I think Talmud Torah and all the schools today greatly restrict you- you sit in a classroom with 30 students. Until everyone understands you cannot move on ... I would learn much more - I achieved with my father until the bar mitzvah much more really than the Talmud Torah learned. When I mastered something, we moved on (Joshua).

Most interviewees describe learning that stems from them, with parents in the field to support. Joshua describes significant learning in which he created a book on birds and insects that was based on research he did on them, and his parents supported him.

I remember: at the age of eight I wrote a set of birds and insects an all sorts - - each one I made observations and each one with its own color, and what I saw. And my parents really supported it. My uncle designed it exactly according to a book of this kind - with pictures, with design, with everything. A lot of things. Everything I did, they really, really supported (Joshua).

However, homeschooling graduates also talked about a learning gap that they had to fill when integrating into the system. Homeschooling and the free learning approach, which allowed them to learn out of desire and curiosity actually created a situation where on the one hand they could have a broader knowledge of certain subjects than the average school student, and on the other hand be lacking in subjects taught in school and required for matriculation or undergraduate studies.

It seems that in their opinion the advantages outweigh the disadvantages - the advantages of learning out of desire and interest, the possibility of using school time for things that are more important and interesting to them outweigh the disadvantages of lack of certain knowledge for matriculation exams. The missing knowledge can be completed quickly and easily in their opinion, while what they received from homeschooling is more significant.

Negative experience ... I remember coming to the Hila project (a government-run project that helps young people complete matriculation), so I was a little taken aback that I was lagging behind in the material a bit, but that was not a problem. I stuck to it all very, very quickly (Yoni).

I feel I am much more able to approach the subject and I know I can learn it. Because all the subjects I know I approached and studied them relatively independently. Help was around, I could ask questions if I wanted to, I was told what was worth going to look at but I learned relatively independently. What delayed me? ...I reached the age of eighteen with knowing only the mathematics I had been able to learn from the age of seventeen, and I arrived without computer knowledge and without ... I had material to complete. I do not feel it is very problematic. Maximum, I take another year after the army to study. Most people also do prep school anyway. But there may be some who are in a hurry and then it matters (Eitan).

## Discussion

### Activities According to Age (Adolescence versus Childhood)

Interviewees saw a change over the years in the way they chose to spend their time from childhood to their teen years. In childhood the activities revolved more around staying with parents and siblings, classes, games with friends, and homeschooling sessions. As they progressed in age, the activities became more concentrated - whether in developing a hobby, in a permanent job, in significant and high-level volunteering, in higher education at university, or in matriculation. Indeed, studies show that adolescents have a growing focus on independence and preparation for adult employment or further education (Sroufe et al., 2004).

Another social area in which the cognitive advances of adolescence are influenced is moral judgment – the process of thinking and judging concerning taking the right action in a given situation (Sroufe et al., 2004, p. 621). It is possible that the involvement of some

homeschooling graduates in volunteering during adolescence is related to the development of moral judgment.

The focus on studies or a particular hobby or work stems from an interest in the hobby or an understanding of the importance of work and studies. The ability to engage in a particular field out of an understanding of its importance or out of interest in the field are characteristics of intrinsic motivation, and this will be detailed in the next section.

### **Learning From Intrinsic Motivation**

Interviewees talked about voluntary learning, by choice. Most of them claimed that learning was not forced on them but came on their own initiative. In the only case perhaps described as learning out of social pressure (of the environment, not of the parents), it was also argued that the learning was ineffective. The interviewees see great value in choosing to learn and in learning from inner motivation.

In the present study, homeschooling graduates described their learning experiences. Many interviewees referred to learning out of desire and interest. Most of them described homeschooling in the unschooling approach or an approach close to it and claimed that they were not required to study except perhaps on very basic topics like English, arithmetic, and reading. They argued that learning was out of desire and curiosity or understanding of the importance of the subject and without necessity. They described a passion for learning and learning by choice.

From the interviews, it seems that their learning stems from intrinsic motivation because they learned out of a desire and understanding of the importance of the subject and without coercion. It seems that the educational approach that gave them autonomy and freedom of choice regarding their studies eventually led them to learn from intrinsically motivated learning. Parental support of their children's autonomy does not mean permissiveness. Parental autonomy support is an active process that promotes healthy psychological and social development and learning (Joussemet et al., 2008).

The learning that the interviewees describe is characterized by two main points: learning from choice and mastering the knowledge that interests them or is important to them. These are exactly the points that characterize internal motivation – motivation from understanding the importance of the topic or from interest in the topic. The gaps they find in certain areas also stem from the fact that the interviewees do not find interest or importance in these areas, and this will be detailed in the next section.

### **Learning What Is Needed in Life and Learning that Is Influenced by the Family**

It can be seen among these homeschooling graduates that on the one hand there was learning (sometimes high and in-depth learning) and on the other hand there were gaps in relation to the core studies: mathematics and English. The interviewees claimed that they acquired education according to what they needed at the time: most of them learned English out of an understanding of the importance or out of a need that existed. Math, they knew at a basic level that allowed them to get by in life, and high math they did not need to live. Those who did acquire mathematics at a high level did so out of choice, interest, and desire or out of the fact that this is what they knew within their family, meaning that the mathematical language was no less accessible to them than the Hebrew language.

Many studies have found a link between parent education and child education. A study by Dadon Golan et al. (2019) analyzed the matriculation scores of Israeli high school students and found that every year in parental education increases the chance of education of their children by three percent. A study conducted by Ersado and Gignoux (2014) that

examined Egyptian youth over decades (1964-1985) found that access to education in Egypt has improved significantly over the past three decades. However, access to higher education continues to remain significantly lower for children from rural areas and for those whose parents have low education or are engaged in elementary activities. Data from the Central Bureau of Statistics in Israel for 2019 indicate that more than 60% of those aged 30 and over whose parents did not study at all, do not have a matriculation certificate.

In light of these data, it seems that the comparison between the families of the children of homeschooling is no less relevant than the comparison between children of homeschooling and children of school education for the purpose of understanding how many homeschooled children continue on to higher education. The issue has been examined among school children and not among homeschooled children, but it can be assumed that in homeschooling, the impact of parental education is even higher. In the present study, the impact of the home on the children can be seen on several levels: (1) homeschooling graduates who work in fields similar to those of the parents – graduates whose parents work in high-tech went towards computers, graduates whose parents are engaged in construction and agriculture went towards construction and agriculture, and (2) graduates who described in an interview accessibility to knowledge due to the fact that their parents studied or engaged in the field.

### **The Importance of the Study and its Limitations**

The phenomenon of homeschooling has been growing in recent decades. In the United States many studies have been conducted on the subject and in Israel, too, studies have been conducted, especially in the last decade. However, it is difficult to see the phenomenon from a broader perspective of homeschooling graduates because so far there has not been a significant population of homeschooling graduates in Israel. The contribution of the research is therefore in expanding knowledge about homeschooling in Israel from the point of view of homeschooling graduates. In addition, this study contributes new theoretical insight regarding intrinsic motivation and self-directed learning as they relate to homeschooling.

Israel serves as an interesting research case, as the distribution of its students' achievements in international exams is characterized by one of the highest gaps among all OECD countries (Bass, 2021). Does homeschooling widen these gaps or offer a different educational path for anyone who wants it? Insights from this research can contribute to the discussion on the subject in relation to the ways of learning in homeschooling and the understanding of what it requires from the parents in terms of investment. The limitations of the research are related to the minority of the population in Israel of homeschooling graduates and therefore also the limitation of the possibilities of research on them. In the present study it was not possible to select participants who are long after homeschooling and thus see the process from a broader perspective.

It will be worthwhile to conduct further research on homeschooling graduates in Israel that will deal with other issues such as society, relationships, and mental well-being, and that examine the homeschooling experience in a broad social perspective.

Qualitative research is not interested in offering nomothetic causal accounts. That is, it does not speak in general terms about the causal relations between variables. Much qualitative research is, however interested in ideographic causality, and context-specific accounts of relationships between ideas and experiences. The participants' accounts in this study suggest that homeschooling, for them, fostered intrinsic motivation. Their descriptions of their learning experiences paint a vivid picture of self-motivated learning through desire, curiosity, and interest.



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