

Learning at Home: Exploring the Benefits of Homeschooling in Pakistan

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Abstract

Homeschooling is a form of experiential learning which is fast picking momentum worldwide as an alternative educational choice driven by motivations unique to each family. No matter what the motivation, the end is to make learning more meaningful and value laden. Subject to much controversy by critics, especially in the realm of socialization, identity formation and academic performance, it is thought of as a bold and deviant ideology by mainstream society. Guided with a phenomenological approach, through in-depth interviews which were analyzed qualitatively, this exploratory study explores the benefits of homeschooling as experienced by six families from Karachi who decided to pull out their children from elite private schools to homeschool them due to dissatisfaction with the given schools. Findings revealed that the most conspicuous benefits derived from homeschooling were strengthened familial bonds, better socialization, improved academic learning, better social and moral instruction, and increased opportunities for self-discovery apart from other aggregate benefits.

Keywords: home education, homeschooling, student centered learning, educational alternatives, Unschooling, Alternative Learning

Introduction

Beginning in the late 1970s, the home has reacquired popular appeal as an educational locus (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013; West, 2009) and for many children today, school is anchored in their home (Varnham, 2008). For them, their parents are their teachers. This practice is commonly known as home education, home schooling, and even ‘unschooling’ with focus on natural or child-centered learning (Varnham, 2008). For these parents, homeschooling becomes the means to strengthen familial bonds and helps resist the detrimental influences of materialism, moral pessimism, and anti-intellectualism which are perceived as pervading contemporary society and institutional schooling (Wyatt, 2008; Morton, 2010; West, 2009).

The roots of homeschooling movement lie in the United States in the 1970s (Moreau, 2012) where it emerged as a liberal alternative to public schooling (Hough, 2010) to attend to the modest needs of children’s learning and religious customs (Ray, 2002; Wilhelm & Firmin, 2009). The homeschooling movement came to the surface following compulsory attendance laws enacted throughout the United States, and has grown to a conspicuous size since then (Dobson, 2000).

From an almost nonexistent concept, homeschooling has mushroomed to a phenomenon that has gained global currency (Ray, 2013; Ray, 2018; Jamaluddin, Alias & Dewitt 2015; West, 2009; Aurini & Davies, 2005; Glenn & de Groof, 2002; Planty, Hussar, Snyder, Kena, KewalRamani, 2009; Kemp & Dinkes, 2009; Webb, 2011). In the United States alone, there were about 2.3 million homeschooled children, as of 2016 as opposed to 2 million in 2010; which shows that the homeschool population is growing at an estimated 2% to 8% per year (Ray, 2018). This increase mirrors an increasing disaffection with formal education systems (Lyman, 1998; Edward 2002) and a growing public approval of homeschooling (Lines, 2000).

Homeschooling can be understood as a constructivist approach in education by employing the student-centered Learning (SCL) approach (Attard, Emma, DiLoio, Geven & Santa, 2010). The theory and practice of SCL has evolved over the past hundred years incorporating contributions of the likes of Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky. SCL is grounded in the idea of teaching learners how to think (Tsui, 2002) and it is an active and participatory approach that facilitates independent and active learning (MacHemer & Crawford, 2007) beyond the confines of classrooms.

Homeschooling is a fairly avant-garde practice in Pakistan comprising a small budding community of parents who are not satisfied with schools and the educations received therein, and, therefore, choose to assume this responsibility themselves. Conclusively, homeschooling assumes the form of an educational alternative that emphasizes quality education based on moral values and beliefs while strengthening family bonds.

Prompted by the dearth of research on this subject in Pakistan, this exploratory qualitative research undertakes to describe parental experiences with homeschooling to ascertain the benefits gained by their unique educational choice. This study shall also enable us to construct an efficacious understanding of parental motivations to continue to homeschool their children due to the satisfaction derived from the homeschooling endeavor. The findings shall also build an active understanding regarding the dissatisfaction of parents with private schools; as all the students in this study attended private schools before being pulled out to be homeschooled. This study is guided with the following main research question:

What are the benefits derived from homeschooling which parents' feel they did not get from schools?

Literature Review

Review of literature reveals that homeschooling is characterized by competing parental motivations, philosophies, and practices. The cultural background (van Schalkwyk & Bower, 2011), geographical location (Hanna, 2012) and personal beliefs (Kraftl, 2013) all influence the assigned homeschooling practices and norms. The methods, materials and curricula used vary from parent to parent (Moreau, 2012).

Motivations to homeschool can be divided in two broad canonical divisions as espoused by Van Galen (1986, 1991): ideological and pedagogical, with many researchers including Basham (2001), Knowles (1991), Knowles, Muchmore and Spaulding (1994) who employ Van Galen's broad division as the baseline to build motivational research on. Ideological motivations are basically religious and social (Moore & Moore, 1981), while pedagogical motivations focus on the process of education (Collom, 2005). Both domains parallel each other now as the current homeschooling movement has moved from the narrow dichotomy of these two extremes into the mainstream (Wilhelm & Firmin, 2009) with a swarm of middle grounders homeschooling due to an array of motives (Collom, 2005; Hammons, 2001; Reich, 2002; Russo, 1999).

An amalgamation of literature accrued from various researches on homeschooling in USA and across the globe reveals that the most conspicuously mentioned reasons to home school stand to be religious reasons (Collom, 2005; Kunzman, 2009; Gray & Riley, 2015); discontentment with the academic instruction provided; concern about the school environment including safety, drugs or negative peer pressure (NCES, 2008; Princiotta & Bielick, 2006; Kunzman, 2009; West, 2009; Ray, 2015), physical violence (Davis, 2010) and psychological abuse; bullying (Davis, 2010); racism (Mazama & Lundy, 2012) and unhealthy sexuality (Ray, 2015; Jamaluddin et al., 2015).

The inability of traditional schools to support and cater to the learners' needs (Kraftl, 2013; Jolly, Matthews, & Nester, 2012; Vigilant et al., 2014), absence of adequate inclusive practices in schools for special needs and the highly gifted children is another powerful driver for homeschooling, shifting the space of learning to the home as the need for a protective and safe environment becomes imperative (Hurlbutt, 2011; Jolly et al. 2012). The curricular flexibility that homeschooling allows resonates well with highly gifted learners to maintain rigorous in-depth focus on a specific subject or project, to accelerate their learning pace, choice of individual mentoring, internships, access to programs in the larger community (Kearney, 1992).

In the realm of relevancy and in terms of effectiveness, the practice of homeschooling is the recipient of contrasting and competing responses (Jamaluddin et al., 2015). One of the leading claims in support of homeschooling is that homeschooled students receive a better education and depict higher academic achievement levels than their public-school peers. They outperform conventionally schooled children on all standardized tests (Chang et al, 2011; Moreau, 2012; Ray, 2000; Ray & Rudner, 2001; Ray, 2013; Ray, 2013; Wilhelm & Firmin, 2009; Gloeckner & Jones, 2013).

For example, Rudner (1999) utilized the results of tests taken by homeschool students across the nation with a sample size of 20,760 students in grades K-12 and reported that homeschool students scored higher than their public-school peers did on standardized tests. However, the results of this survey were based upon voluntary participation and may not reflect the true situation (Hough, 2010).

Parental involvement in children's learning has been associated as a catalyst to success (Jamaluddin, et. al, 2015) whether learning at home or while performing at school. A higher level of parental involvement is evidenced in the lives of homeschooled children (Lines, 2002)

which may be the primary reason that accounts for the academic success of homeschooled children. Another major factor in the parents' decision to choose to homeschool is family unity (Mayberry & Knowles, 1989; Knowles, 1991; Mayberry, 1988). These parents feel that a benefit of homeschooling is that they can afford stronger relationships with their children which would not have been possible if their children were in school.

A comprehensive study by Henderson and Berla (1994) reviewed 64 studies on parent involvement and concluded that children fare better in school; and learn happily when parents immerse themselves in their children's education at home. The results of the above study support many others which show that parental involvement exercises a strong influence upon the academic achievement of students (Bempechat, 1992; Epstein, 1995; Henderson, 1981; Hickman, Greenwood, & Miller, 1995; Juang & Silbereisen, 2002; Stevenson & Baker, 1987; Thorkildsen & Stein, 1998; Zellman & Waterman, 1998).

Compared to parents with low or median ratings, parents with high involvement ratings tended to have children with higher grades and scores. This finding holds across all family income levels and backgrounds (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Similarly, Gloeckner and Jones (2013), and Ray (2013; 2015) also highlighted the fact that homeschooled students typically outperformed traditionally schooled students in SAT and ACT scores (Chang et al, 2011) which resulted in their active enrollment in colleges. Their GPA in colleges and universities is also above the traditionally schooled students (Gloeckner & Jones, 2013; Ray, 2013).

Another startling observation by Collom (2005) is that those who homeschool due to discontent with public schools have children who boast some of the highest reading and language scores.

Conclusively, due to its differentiated instruction and individualized attention, homeschooling may present a qualitatively advanced educational environment for children with special needs (Arora, 2003; Duvall, Delquadri & Ward, 2004; Ensign, 2000; Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010). A study of 250 homeschooling families in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania by Hanna (2012) confirmed that a teaching approach that is tailored around the children's learning needs is very important for learners to learn.

Homeschooling bears many more benefits that make it a growing choice amongst parents. Medlin (2013) found many studies bearing testimony that homeschoolers had better social skills, were happier and more emotionally stable than the students of conventional schools. He discovered no studies supporting the contrary. Gray and Riley (2015) confirm the above also through their survey of seventy-five adults who had been unschooled (a term coined by Holt in the 1970s; it is a variety of homeschooling with no curriculum, no obligatory lessons and no testing (Gray & Riley, 2015) for the last two years of high school. They were found happy with their unschooling with the exception of three respondents who were unhappy with their unschooling. However, their reasons were social isolation as they were in dysfunctional families with mothers who were psychologically depressed and fathers who were uninvolved (Gray & Riley, 2015).

Ray (2015) also mentions that home educated students are doing well above average on research measures that include self-concepts, self-esteem, and social interactions with peers, strong familial cohesion, leadership abilities, and active participation in community life. Ray (2015) further goes on to mention that their engagement is with a diverse crowd of people from all walks of life and in a variety of activities ranging from field trips, sports teams, field trips, political and social drives, and church activities. A study by Korkmaz and Dunman (2014) from

130 respondents from an urban center of Turkey found that as parents are responsible for designing their children's learning at home, homeschooling increasingly becomes a means to develop better character and morality.

Contradicting the above findings, Green-Hennessy (2014), and van Schalkwyk and Bouwer (2011) discovered that homeschooling adolescents were reported to fall behind in academic performance and faced more social difficulties compared to school going children (Green-Hennessy, 2014).

Notwithstanding, despite the challenges associated with homeschooling including finances, time management and space issues, parent training and qualifications, compounded stress and burnout, criticism of family and society, the upside is flexibility (Blok, 2004) and enhanced familial bonds, personalized attention and individualized instruction (Ray, 2000) which create the ideal learning space (Jamaluddin et al., 2015; Bauman, 2003; Knowles, Marlow & Muchmore, 1992).

Homeschooling is on the rise worldwide which speaks of its usefulness as an educational alternative (Ray, 2013; Jamaluddin, Alias & Dewitt, 2015; Webb, 2011)). Conclusively, review of literature appeases public fears of homeschooling giving birth to academic and social inadequacies (Ray, 2013). Notwithstanding, as most of the research reflects the Western perspective, the dynamics of our context are unknown so it is an area of uncontested exploration, and invites research.

Methodology

This qualitative research employs the phenomenological approach due to its efficacy in educational research (Bourke, 2007). The catchphrase in phenomenological research is to

‘describe’ (Groenewald, 2004). The researcher aims to describe the phenomenon as accurately as possible by remaining true to the data (ibid).

All qualitative research is an interpretive analysis of human experience (Olsen, 2008) and a researcher utilizing a phenomenological approach is concerned with the lived experiences of the people (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Bourke, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 1998, 2003; Denzin, 1994). As this research undertakes to understand the parental motivations behind homeschooling in Pakistan, data was collected from participants with sufficient experience and exposure to the phenomenon to lend richness to the study.

Participants

Participants in this study were selected through purposive sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Morse, 1991). The researcher chose participants who had sufficient experience with homeschooling (at least three to five years) to lend richness of experiences. For a phenomenological study, it is recommended to study at least three (Giorgi, 2009) to 10 participants (Dukes, 1984). Hence, the researcher chose the median range, and engaged six parents from Karachi, a cosmopolitan city of Pakistan, who were willing to freely articulate their experiences as they relate to the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 1990). Mothers were chosen due to their being the prime caregivers at home also in charge of the homeschooling endeavor, and due to their easy accessibility.

The participating mothers are urban educated middle-class families where usually there was a single breadwinner in the form of the father. Family size varied from a minimum of two children to a maximum of nine children. As all the parents had multiple homeschooled children, it was an added benefit. The homeschooled children range from ages three to 20 (there are two

homeschooled children who are adults now aged 25 and 29, successfully working); and the numbers of years the families have been homeschooling comprise three years to over 22 years.

Measures/Procedures

Contact was established with two homeschooling moms in Karachi who acted as the intermediaries to help the researcher locate other parents who fulfilled the research criteria, and were desirous to share their experiences wholeheartedly to conduct prolific research. A meeting was conducted with the two mothers prior to holding any interviews of research interest. One of the mothers who fit the research criteria went on to become a participant in the research. However, the rest of the participants were selected through purposeful sampling.

A written informed consent form was prepared carefully in observance of good research ethics and emailed to the participants prior to the date of the interviews. It apprised them of ethical considerations and the consensual nature of their participation in the study. They were informed of their choice to decline participation at any point of the research. Protection of their privacy and confidentiality was guaranteed. Pseudonyms have been assigned to maintain their anonymity.

Data collection

Data was primarily collected through in-depth interviews of parents. The interviews were conveniently recorded on the iPhone audio application of the researcher. The interviews were conducted on dates and times prescribed by the parents at their choice of location, which was their home. The actual length of each interview session ranged between sixty minutes to an hour and a half. By availing extra time post-interviews observations of participating families were possible which lent a deeper understanding of their daily routines, study spaces, familial

arrangements, and idiosyncrasies. Field notes taken during the course of the interview are also utilized as secondary sources of data collection.

Data Analysis

Each transcription known as *protocol* (Colaizzi, 1978) was read several times subsequently to gain a holistic command of content, and coding techniques were employed for discovering and marking main ideas in the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Similar data were grouped together in categories whereby salient themes, recurring ideas or language, and patterns (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Thorne, 2000) between the six families were identified. This process actively ensued continuously until the data finally collapsed into a common pattern and common overarching themes (Thorne, 2000). This method is also similar to the constant comparative analysis of Glaser and Strauss (1967) which involves taking one piece of data (one interview, one statement, one theme) and comparing it with all others that may be similar or different to conceptualize the possible relations between various data (Thorne, 2000).

This data was entered into six individual excel sheets whereby salient categories and themes were extracted for each participant and written besides each block of data. Points of discussion and reference that the researcher could use for analytical analysis and commentary were also put into a separate column on the same sheets. Manual codes were assigned to congeal themes.

Once the researcher formulated meanings from the interviews of respondents, each data analysis summary sheet was emailed to each of the participants for them to review and verify the derived meanings formulated by the researcher from their verbatim words to ensure internal validity and reliability (Kvale, 1996) of the findings. Upon return to the researcher with confirmation of the like and minor suggested changes in one or two participants' narratives, the

individual six data analysis sheets were collapsed into one master excel sheet. It comprised all six participants' transcribed comments, and the researcher's interpretation of the comments as approved by participants organized under specific themes and categories for further analysis and final write up.

All the participants largely agreed with the researcher's interpretation of their narratives, and out of the six, three suggested minor changes.

Findings

In depth analysis of data to learn of the answer to the research question about benefits of homeschooling was concluded with the following derived major benefits (1) Strengthened familial bonds, (2) Better socialization, (3) Improved academic learning, (4) Enhanced social skills and moral values, (5) Increased opportunities for self-discovery, (6) Flexibility of subject choices and teachers. Other aggregate benefits mentioned were freedom from stressful routines and homework, improved health, more time for faith-based activities, and financial relief for some. In addition, there is less dependency of children on electronic gadgets and devices. The benefits derived from homeschooling were also strong motivations for the six families to continue to homeschool their children; and the reason for their decision of not enrolling their younger school-aged children into schools.

Strengthened (Familial) bonds

For Tanya the most enjoyable aspect about homeschooling and the biggest benefit is that she gets to "spend time" with her children which has resulted in their learning of "each other's interests." As a result, she shares "a strong bond" with her children. In addition, sibling relationships have improved remarkably. Tanya confides that her children are more "receptive and approachable." They are not shy to share their sentiments; and discuss and voice their

opinions more openly and without restraint. Simra also experiences an unprecedented “closeness to children” that was not nurtured before. Similarly, Aliya quotes strong bonds with her children due to homeschooling as a very big benefit of homeschooling. All her children look up to her and value her for her complete involvement in all aspects of their life.

Hafsa mentions the same benefit due to spending a good chunk of time with her children. She emphasizes that their relationships both within the family and with extended family members have “strengthened” which she passionately feels “was not possible in school days” as “there was no time” for that. Now, her children have “more time to socialize” due to the “flexibility of academics” that homeschooling provided for them.

Hafsa recounted that a huge advantage of homeschooling is “enhanced sibling relationships” which is “only possible as the children spend more time in close proximity at home” and thus, have quality interactions with each other. Hafsa narrated how her son who had no interest in reading got “inspired to read” due his elder sibling who was an avid reader. Now, even her younger daughter is picking up on it. In her own words, “Nobody is pushing them to learn. They are being pushed by the environment” that has been provided to them through home education.

As a parent, Bina even finds that as she “has spent time with them and understands them better”, constant “monitoring and vigilance, like school teachers,” is not required. She conceded that an added advantage is that there is “more trust” between herself and her children. She “has more free time on hand to do things” that she wants to do “without worrying” that her children “are not studying or that they are wasting their time.”

Better Socialization

Usually, critics argue for the socialization of children who are home educated yet for Tanya this was a persistent issue at school for her eldest daughter. Although thriving academically, she faced a marked deficit in finding peers to socialize with at school. She hardly had friends in school and as expressed by her teachers, she would be found “sitting alone during break hours.” “Surprisingly, after being pulled out from school, she became more social.” Much to Tanya’s excitement, “She even successfully designed, planned and executed a program for charitable purposes involving forty children with her peers without any adult help.” She shone in a social environment that was heavily entrenched on providing her with opportunities that showcased her talents and individuality and peers who shared the same interests as herself.

In the realm of friendships and socialization, Bina expounded that there were times when two out of her five children wished that they were in school because “they got to meet their friends there every day.” However, as they got older, “they themselves realized the benefit of not going to school.” She recalls her second son Kamran telling her that when he was in school, the dilemma was to “either become friends with somebody in the classroom or have no friends at all;” while out of school, he can now “choose his friends selectively.”

Ameera’s older son was “prey to peer pressure.” He was “doing the wrong things unfortunately.” Homeschooling has relieved him “of the pressure of having to keep up, having to catch up, having to do the wrong thing even when you feel the urge is strong and you want to do the right thing.” Although he still lacks good peers for socialization, a major benefit is that he is “not negatively socialized.”

Simra said that hers and scores of other homeschooling families are socialized in a group that meets on a weekly basis. It has the semblance of a unique clique; their unitary “support system.” She narrates that “it is like having an extended family where I don’t choose the family.”

She feels “blessed” because every mother on the group is someone who “adds value” to her child's growing up experiences.

Hafsa deliberated that “homeschooled children interact with a cross section of people not segregated by age.” As they meet many people older than them from all walks of life, their interactions are “more meaningful and value laden” and her children have developed a sharper acuity of perception. She feels her children were particularly lucky in this realm and have had brilliant opportunities “to interact with inspiring teachers” and “good people” that played the role of “good mentors” for them. She reflected, “I am very happy that the teachers they went to never did subject teaching. The teachers discussed life with them. Subjects will be learnt. The real deal is that the child should have options to be able to solve problems of any kind in life.”

Improved Academic Learning

Aliya thinks that “all knowledge has to have practical application.” She contended that in schools you are “not being taught practical knowledge.” In keeping with her educational philosophy, along with their studies, since a very young age, her sons were encouraged to frequent the office with their father. The kids accompanied him wherever he went, even to banks and in meetings. Naturally, they imbibed practical knowledge and knowhow; and hands on training of the real workforce by shadowing their father. The efforts bore fruit when their son expanded his father’s business singlehandedly at a very young age.

Bina alleges that, “a benefit of homeschooling is that you can provide one to one attention which is not possible at school.” Bina confesses that she “gets tense at times” regarding the achievement needs and how to address the gaps therein, however, a benefit of homeschooling for her is that she “can work around issues without feeling pressurized to match the pace with everybody else.” Bina’s son Omar stopped reading right after they took him out of school, but

through unorthodox and innovative methods employed by the mother, and “by providing him books that sparked his interest,” he picked up books again “without the pressure” of having to read just because everyone else was reading.

Simra admitted candidly that previously her “only role was to push or force her children through the day” to do things. Now she doesn’t do that as she understands that “the point of homeschooling is to inspire self-learning.” She went on to say that as she understands both “their strengths and weaknesses better,” she aims at “variety in the ways that her children learn.” For her children, “Learning is flexible. It’s alright for them to watch a video or an animal documentary and the task for the day is done. Even during busy days, they can work and reap benefits without being tired as opposed to the times when they came home from school really tired and upset because it had been ‘a struggle’ for them to get through the day.”

Simra also mentioned that a benefit of homeschooling is that each child can learn at their pace without unkind labels attributed to them as in school “where a student who is not good at something is labeled as a D grader; they (also) don’t have to compare their marks with everyone else and feel bad.” She further expounded that if a child is stronger in English reading and comprehension, at home, she can “accelerate his pace” to match his excellence in that area while the pace of other subjects which are not his strength can be decelerated. This flexibility in academics and subject choices is a huge benefit of homeschooling.

Enhanced social skills and moral values

Aliya and her husband took great pains to inculcate values in their children, thus “character building” was an intrinsic aspect of her homeschooling. She feels that it is important that “kids are taught to place the proper value on things” which they can only learn if they have seen “the tough times and the struggles.” We need to train our children “to aspire to work

towards getting things;” hence, the understanding that “things don’t come easy.” Her kids had everything at particular ages but they were taught these invaluable lessons.

Simra offered a pragmatic analogy to highlight the strength of teaching character education to school children before academics. She submitted that, “there is a lot of talk about the Finnish and Japanese education system these days. The Japanese do not teach reading and writing till later. It’s all tarbiyyah.” She maintained that even “the Islamic education system...is all about tarbiyyah.” Simra remarked that the children, who have recently left school, are “self-conscious.” In contrast, the “homeschooled children are not concerned how other people perceive them. So that is ‘a very positive effect’ of homeschooling. She perceives that ‘peer pressure’ starts to form impressions on children’s minds around grade five or six so it is better that kids are out of school around that time.”

Ameera spoke of how her children were “always involved in household chores” which has taught them “responsibility and good work ethics.” It has also “freed them” from “dependence on others for their own needs.” Her older son is used to “preparing his own lunch” since the age of nine. This continued even after he was homeschooled. Thus, her children know that it was part of what they need to do because “in a family everyone has to contribute.” They “cannot have just rights and no obligations.” Having taught them concepts as “self-help and self-reliance,” she has made them “independent workers.”

Tanya opined that her children’s “tarbiyyah has improved” due to homeschooling as there are no “hidden factors” that would “adversely” affect her children. She “is aware of what they are exposed to as opposed to what they would be exposed to in the classroom” over which she would exercise “no control.” She confessed that she is “in command of their relationships and

environment” as she knows the children her kids associate with and is even “observant of their families.”

Tanya further elaborated that her children’s thinking would have been muddled had they still been in school and it would have been “difficult to convince them” for many things. For example, “If they were going to school they would say others have gadgets, phones why shouldn’t we?” Now they themselves “question” preset societal behaviors as they are in a completely different mindset and their thinking is not construed in the ordinary way. “They think critically,” and “judge the value” of phenomenon, processes and material possessions. They do not place gratuitous value on tangible belongings that are devoid of true intrinsic benefit to them.

Hafsa spoke with conviction that “one thing that played a positive role was perhaps that I was always a working mother. So, they unwittingly learnt that work, study and home life can be balanced simultaneously.” It is just “about taking charge of your life.”

Increased opportunities for self-discovery

Hafsa and Tanya vouched that home education gave their children the time to reflect on themselves and discover their innate talents and potential which was not possible when they were “immersed completely” in school. Hafsa expounded that it is only possible when “they are not occupied elsewhere.” One’s talents are exposed to oneself “only when you dabble with tasks.” She proudly recounted how her daughter does a lot of her workshop work. Similarly, Tanya also alluded to her daughter who was a loner in school evolving to be a confident young girl who went on to organize a big event for charity all on her own initiative and efforts. She realized her potential when she had time to reflect on herself at home. In her early teens, her daughter also “runs an online business.”

Flexibility of subject choices and teachers

As the parent of older children pursuing the Cambridge system and following the O and A levels programs, Bina complained of limited subject choices for students enrolled in schools. She explained how each school requires students to choose from “neatly segmented subject combinations” which are grouped together as a “Science, Business, or Engineering group” to take exams for at “a predetermined and prescribed grade level.” Bina succinctly commented that homeschooling gave her children the liberty “to take not only subjects of their choice” but also “the freedom to take the exams at the time of their choice along with the flexibility in the number of subjects to appear for.” Bina concluded that, “As a homeschooler I am not limited with choices; I don’t have to restrict my children.”

Homeschooling mothers of older children explained that not everything has to be taught to the children at home. Aliya, Bina and Hafsa mentioned how they find the liberty to choose tutors a mammoth benefit of homeschooling. They went on to emphasize that in schools you have to study from a teacher who has been assigned for you and not chosen by you. In the home education enterprise, you can exercise the option of your choice and choose the “best teachers.”

Mothers confessed to other summative benefits of homeschooling also. Simra is happy now sans the “stress of running around to pick and drop children” from school. “There is less time spent on the road.” She is also glad that she has been relieved from the “burden of homework.” Bina is happy that her children are able to pay more attention to faith-based rituals, such as “preparing for Friday prayers” in a much auspicious way due to being home as opposed to being in school. Ameera’s elder son’s “health has improved” remarkably. Both her children have “a healthier morning routine; and a healthier and more natural lifestyle.” There was also a definite “financial relief” as homeschooling was “cheaper” for her. Conclusively, Ameera explained that “cost effectiveness depends on one's style of homeschooling” as some families try

to cater to individual co-curricular interests of all children, and that becomes “more expensive than sending them to school.”

Discussion

When commencing homeschooling, most of the parents confessed to having to work twice as hard to reorient their children to learning their way, and detoxifying them from the after effects of the indoctrination of school years in terms of routines and methodologies/pedagogies of teaching. Once a home education program was initiated on the home turf, the mothers were found to employ a multitude of innovative methods and diverse resources to bring better academic instruction to the table. After spending time with their children, they learnt of their strengths and weaknesses and attempted to hone their strengths and work towards improvement of their weak areas. The successes of their children speak of the efficacy of their homeschooling endeavor and their abilities as holistic teachers of their children.

For Muslim communities especially in the subcontinent, families are quintessential units of socialization and familial bonds are cultivated at length assiduously. Notably, strengthening familial relations which was found to be one of the strongest motivations to homeschool was also noted as the greatest benefit of homeschooling. Homeschooling affords families with unprecedented opportunities of time and leisure to improve the quality of interactions which are punctuated with contentment and joy resulting in strengthening of bonds, *more* closeness and *better understanding* between parents and children, siblings and even extended family members.

Working with flexible schedules, with the elimination of stressful triggers of school life, like demanding routines and cumbersome homework, the mothers are more relaxed and confess to enjoying the time spent with their children. An added advantage is less dependence on peer

socialization if the bonds between siblings are robust. For most parents, this enduring benefit of homeschooling becomes a concomitant motivation to continue to homeschool.

Against popular belief and criticism of critics, at home, parents enjoy the flexibility in choices of friends for their children nurtured in an atmosphere of normalcy without the constant threat of bullying. Away from negative peer influences, there is better socialization opportunity for children out of schools. Children are better socialized in natural settings without artificial age segregations and meet and interact with a cross section of people that enhances their learning outcomes.

Parents professed that homeschooling affords them flexibility in teaching approaches, learning choices, and schedules also which has tremendously helped the children enhance their academic output. Even those who were academically bright have further honed themselves. All mothers reiterated that in a homeschooling program, one never runs out of time.

In Islam, the term *tarbiyyah* enjoys a holistic meaning and is the bedrock of the process of education. It is not limited to mean moral instruction; it has social implications too. It is a process of both individual and social development (Ali & Bagley, 2013). Hence, teaching responsibility and socially and ethically responsive behavior was one of overt motivations of all six mothers to commence homeschooling. Although not all mothers put it in words, it was implicitly deduced from the interviews.

Parents were able to impart practical lessons of life including hard work, compassion and good character to their children in the home education program on a daily basis which parents feel was impossible to learn from schools and while at school. Another advantage is learning about their duties and responsibilities to the environment, their family and their community and society at large. Learning how to multi-task is another concept that is incorporated in daily life

by the parents at home as an inherently covert curriculum. When children see how their parents, especially mothers, unhesitatingly perform many given roles in their lives optimally, they internalize this as a veritable fact of life, and unconsciously learn to emulate it.

Parents perceive education to be purposeful and dynamic with the objective of self-progression of the individual seeking it, in terms of physical, intellectual, material and spiritual realms. Education is not limited to academics. It is a holistic and lifelong process. Not unlike parents, we are privy to an increasing fraternity of intellectuals and educationists complaining about the inability of the contemporary educational system to facilitate human potential, creativity and intellectual growth (Robinson, 2010; Holt, 1995a, 1995b; Iqbal, 2008; Gatto, 2005, 2009).

They assert that modern day schooling arrests and retards intellectual prowess due to its inability to accommodate the individuality of each child. Self-progression cannot be achieved with an over structured curriculum; it can only be realized in a free environment where children can make discriminate choices regarding the process of learning and resources (Gatto, 2005; Holt, 1995a, 1995b; Rafiuddin, 1983; Robinson, 2010).

Consistent with the Student-Centered Learning (SCL) approach which facilitates active and independent learning due to its participatory methodology (MacHemer & Crawford (2007), homeschooling parents as pedagogues played out their role as holistic teachers to cater to total developmental requirements of the children. The homeschooling learning environment was holistic where the teacher partook as a friend, mentor and catalyst (Forbes, 1996). Constantly challenging their own competencies with a program that matched with their interests and pace, the learners realized qualitative growth that required no numerical quantification. Critical

thinking and self-reflection were stimulated when the minds were no longer slaves to preoccupations that were only academic and instructional.

Conclusion

Unthreading from traditional schooling is arduous and demanding. It is a decision wrought with risks and demands holistic sacrifices and an active and committed lifestyle. Armed with an aggressive commitment to provide their kids with a prolific childhood and the desire to enable them to reach their potential, personally and professionally, parents worked assiduously to provide the best opportunities of growth through a mature, safe and free environment conducive for learning at home.

Unlike traditional schooling, the homeschooler's curricula are free from conformity to a harmonized and standardized grade level (Morse, 2001; Kraftl, 2013). As learning occurs both inside and outside the home concomitantly, it encompasses both academic and practical knowledge (Kraftl, 2013) making learning more holistic and centered on the learners' unique needs. Thus, flexibility in designing learning environments, choice of academic subjects, curricular content, method of instruction, and flexibility of timings and diversity of locations makes homeschooling a popular educational alternative with families needing a respite from institutional prescriptions of educating their children.

Homeschooling will indubitably witness growth as an educational choice, while individuals and nations continue to struggle with answers on how to maintain a judicious equilibrium of interests of children, parents and society in the domains of schooling and education (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). How it proliferates as an alternative educational option in Pakistan remains to be seen.

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