

Assessment in homeschooling: Emerging topics

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Abstract

The spread of homeschooling practices in many countries responds to the need of many families to find an alternative to traditional school offerings that respect the well-being, potential and learning times of the child. Assessment, a fundamental element of educational planning in conventional schools, is not considered equally in homeschooling settings, despite its formative value and the possibility that it can act as an element capable of restoring centrality to the child. With references to international literature, the contribution reports an exploratory research conducted in the Italian context that sought to delve into the topic of the methods of examining homeschooling students and the perceptions of school personnel involved in their assessment process. The triangulation of data from different studies on the same topic and from various perspectives (families, teachers and headteachers) helped grasp the phenomenon's complexity and the possibility of defining a school that works for all its students.

La diffusione delle pratiche di *homeschooling* in molti paesi risponde all'esigenza di molte famiglie di trovare un'alternativa all'offerta scolastica tradizionale in grado di rispettare il benessere, le potenzialità e i tempi del bambino. La valutazione, elemento fondamentale della progettazione didattica nella scuola tradizionale, non è altrettanto considerata nelle realtà homeschooling e questo nonostante la sua valenza formativa e la possibilità che possa fungere da elemento in grado di ridare centralità al bambino. Con riferimenti alla letteratura internazionale, il contributo riporta una ricerca esplorativa condotta nel contesto italiano che ha cercato di approfondire il tema delle modalità d'esame degli alunni homeschooling e le percezioni del personale scolastico coinvolto nel loro processo di valutazione. La triangolazione di dati provenienti da studi diversi sullo stesso tema e da prospettive diverse (famiglie, insegnanti e dirigenti scolastici) è risultata utile per cogliere la complessità del fenomeno oltre alla possibilità di cosa possa definire una scuola "per tutti".

Keywords: home schooling; school; assessment; school exam; alternative education

Parole chiave: istruzione parentale; scuola; valutazione; esami scolastici; educazione alternativa

ⁱ This contribution is the result of shared work between the two authors. However, the responsibilities for the paragraphs in this article can be divided as follows: Restiglian for paragraphs 4 and 5 and Busato for paragraphs 2 and 3. The authors jointly wrote paragraphs 1 and 6.

1. Introduction

Homeschooling, or home education, is an alternative educational model to traditional school attendance, characterized by the central role of parents in directly managing their children's learning process. Currently in Italy, various expressions are used to describe it, such as *scuola familiare* (family school), *scuola paterna* (paternal school), and *educazione* or *istruzione parentale* (parental education/instruction). Also widespread are the variants known as deschooling and unschooling, which are characterized by flexible and autonomous learning paths for those who follow them (Holt, 1972; Illich, 1971).

The traditional model of homeschooling has evolved over time into different forms. For example, when it takes place in locations other than the home, with individuals "chosen" by the family, and even in groups of children and teenagers, it can in some ways be defined as a community learning centre.

Homeschooling practices are widespread in many countries worldwide (Cheng & Donnelly, 2019). Among the elements that characterise the choice of families to find an alternative to traditional school provision is undoubtedly the desire for the child to be immersed in an educational environment that is able to take into account his or her well-being, interests, potential, and personal learning modes and times (Purwaningsih & Faunziah, 2020; Eldeeb et al., 2024). While it is not an issue that is extensively explored in the literature concerning homeschooling, assessment stands out as a component of instructional design and one of the features of traditional school systems often aimed at matching children's outcomes to labour market demands rather than individual needs (Knowles, Marlow & Muchmore, 1992) and pursuing learning outcomes set equally for all. Assessment is not central to homeschooling experiences and is often sidelined, as we will try to explain below. The lack of data on assessment processes in homeschooling makes it difficult to compare the outcomes of homeschooled children with those of mainstream schooling, mainly due to the impossibility of defining the actual appropriateness of assessment methods in alternative contexts (Neuman & Guterman, 2016).

Following a review of the international literature on the topic of *homeschooling and assessment*, this paper presents an exploratory study conducted within the Italian context. The research aimed to investigate the examination procedures applied to homeschooled students and to examine the perceptions of school personnel involved in their evaluation processes.

2. An international overview

Starting from the consideration that assessment is an essential issue for the individual's learning, consider, for example, Boud's (2000) concept of sustainable assessment, we wanted in this contribution to explore the connection between assessment and homeschooling within frameworks that emphasise contextual approaches and active learning (Kafarisa, 2019), without reference to national learning surveys, learning outcomes (with consequent difference between structured or unstructured homeschooling-unschooling) or university entrance tests. Research referring to the pandemic period or distance education was excluded, as well as reasoning on the overall evaluation of homeschooling experiences, comparisons of academic achievement between homeschooled and non-homeschooled students (e.g. Yu, Sackett & Kuncel, 2016) and research on school psychologists working with homeschooled students, e.g. in situations of language delays or general special educational needs (Carlson, 2020).

The decision to enter a little-explored field seemed interesting in order to understand if and how assessment in homeschooling takes place, what significance it has for families or structures that manage parental education settings, and how it relates to the assessment that takes place in local schools at the end of the school year and to the idea of assessment of homeschooled students. What we are interested in exploring in this contribution, therefore, is the implementation of assessment processes within the learning processes of homeschooling

situations by parents or educators beyond the external standardised tests that states decide to administer (such as the INVALSI surveys in Italy or the tests in the United States in the case of entry or return to mainstream schooling).

From a literature review of some educational databases (Education source, ERIC, Google scholar) only a few results about this connection emerged¹.

A broader empirical study carried out in Lithuania in 2021-2022 (Naidaitė & Stasiūnaitienė, 2023) tried to answer the question of what the functions of parents are and how the child's education is organised in the case of homeschooling. Regarding recording learning outcomes and their assessment, families are asked to take notes on what children do through electronic diaries. Still, these often do not have a function that allows parents to record the content of education adequately, nor is there any discussion of what would be helpful for the school to understand with regard to what children have done and what they have learnt or what they have studied in terms of the educational programme. Parents stated that they use some form of assessment of their children's achievements that always involves the child in the process, discussing their progress and identifying gaps. In particular, the assessment process in this way would avoid the tensions and stresses alleged to be inherent in traditional schooling.

With the aim of highlighting the impossibility of comparing the educational outcomes of parental education and homeschooling, Neuman and Oz (2016) argue that in structured homeschooling experiences, the same measurement tools, assessment tools and processes are used in schools as they refer to the same objectives (albeit achieved with different teaching-learning processes). In the case of unschooling experiences, on the other hand, the objectives are different; for this reason, any tools or practices used in schools cannot work in these contexts. Even if we wanted to include a tailored education for their children, which is among the reasons families choose homeschooling, we could not find explicit references to specific research. Instead, it would seem that parents do not highlight assessment methodologies and tools as important in educational action (e.g., Firmin et al., 2019; Hanna, 2012).

In an articulate presentation of homeschooling realities in former communist countries, Kostecká (2010) emphasised the different ways in which schools assess homeschooled children. Progress was to be assessed twice a year by law, but the form of assessment was at the discretion of the school directors. For example, one school had opted for an individualised assessment in the form of an interview between teacher and child, always accompanied by the parents, to check whether the child had been educated in an age-appropriate manner and paying attention to the material brought in (in addition to textbooks and exercise books, also paintings, photos and a student portfolio). Parents also had to provide the evaluator with a written report on the child's academic progress, including written records in which study topics were documented on a weekly basis. Other schools preferred written tests and an oral test, often prompting parents of home-schooled children to adapt their curricula to the requirements of the test. Kostecká reports that the requirement for an examination once or twice a year is also widespread in Poland, Estonia, Hungary, Slovenia, and Slovakia. The term 'examination', rather than assessment, refers to a quantitative idea of ascertaining learning and once again restricts parents' choice to adapt curricula to particular children's individual needs and abilities.

This aspect leads to a phenomenon we have also observed in Italy: parents interested in homeschooling tend to apply to schools known as 'homeschooling friends' (Kostecká et al., 2021).

Research by Engchun, Sungtong and Haruthaithanasan (2018) on the management of the learning process by 25 homeschooling families in southern Thailand reveals experience-oriented learning (e.g. with exploration and research) that makes use of both internal and external learning media and resources in a time-flexible and spatially dispersed learning concept. Assessment of learning takes place through diaries, photos, videos and

Facebook and also includes self-assessment processes. It is flexible and adaptable, not close to the academic tests offered by local authorities, and instead responsive to the different learning styles of the students. It is a formative assessment perspective that will be discussed later.

3. The Italian context

Homeschooling practices are becoming increasingly widespread in Italy (Chinazzi, 2021) due to a climate of general distrust and scepticism towards traditional educational offerings (Gamuzza, 2013; Di Motoli, 2019; Chinazzi, 2020). Although the majority of scholarly articles highlight a general increase in the practice of homeschooling, there remains a lack of up-to-date official sources reporting quantitative data. In Italy, according to estimates provided by LAIF (*L'Associazione Istruzione in Famiglia*), the number of primary school children receiving home education rose from 2,243 in the 2018-19 school year to over 10,000 in 2020-21 (Cantone, 2025). A report published by the regional education office in the area where the present study was conducted presents data spanning the period from 2018 to 2022. According to this report, the incidence of homeschooling at the primary school level increased by 0.71%, with the number of students rising from 207 in 2018 to 1,620 in 2022 (MIM-USR Veneto, 2023).

Italy is a country that allows homeschooling practices based on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2016), which in Article 14 guarantees “The freedom to found educational establishments with due respect for democratic principles and the right of parents to ensure the education and teaching of their children in conformity with their religious, philosophical and pedagogical convictions”.

The Italian Constitution establishes, among other things, the obligation not so much to attend school as to be educated, which also legitimises the widespread practice of homeschooling.

Among the major criticisms levelled at the school system is that relating to assessment, which is considered too rigid and focused on grades and linked to a competitive spirit that would limit the individual's personal development in respect of his or her time and possibilities. As mentioned, the present contribution focuses precisely on assessment and, starting from the contrasting opinions and criticisms levelled at the current Italian legislation, intends to explore the assessment of homeschoolers, with particular attention to the proficiency examination provided for in the transition from one-year to the next during primary school.

In Italy, the examination for admission to the next school grade constitutes a significant concern for homeschoolers. The competence assessment and examination provisions are governed by Article 23 of Decree-Law 62/2017. The law stipulates that students in parental education must take an annual proficiency examination to pass to the next class. The exam constitutes the primary instrument through which the public institution supervises and verifies the fulfilment of the school obligation. The test must be taken as an external candidate at a state or parity school² until the fulfilment of compulsory education. Furthermore, Article 3 of Ministerial Decree 05/2021 explains that the examination for admission to the next school grade provides for a written test relating to language skills, a written test concerning logical-mathematical skills and an oral interview.

The legislation may appear unambiguous. However, through a meticulous analysis of the legislative articles, the exponents of the associations promoting and supporting homeschooling raise some perplexities and possible interpretations. The latter aspect could also be relevant within an international dimension.

Numerous blogs and sites recognise the compulsory nature of the exam but discuss its modalities and value within the learning pathway. As Vezzola (2021) states, the exam represents an external conditioning that negatively influences the child's path. Moreover, the test, structured on the basis of the path taken by the class, would contrast with what is stated in the 2012 National Indications, which emphasises the importance of developing competences and goals that require long and extended time (Vezzola, 2021).

Similarly, representatives of LAIF (The Family Education Association³) consider monitoring by the public institution to be necessary, but at the same time criticise the decision to verify the fulfilment of the obligation through an examination (Leali & Cavagna Pecis, 2018). In addition to criticising the state's choice, these authors propose some alternatives to the classic examination: a documented report drawn up by the parents, periodic talks between the parents and/or child and the educational institution, an informal interview of the child in a non-judgmental mutual confrontation, and the child's presentation of materials or work produced during the course.

In disagreement with the examination proposal is instead Erika Di Martino, an influential voice on the Italian scene (founder of the EDUpar and Controscuola blogs). While recognising, at least in part, the compulsory nature of the exam, Di Martino (2022) sees it as a necessary formality only for those who wish to bring their child back into the school system or for those who want to obtain a certification of the knowledge and skills acquired by their child during the year. The Italian homeschooling spokeswoman, considering an external assessment of her children's progress unnecessary, has chosen not to have them take the examination (Di Martino, 2022). It also offers homeschool family's practical guidance for those who choose not to take the exam, making it clear that the path may be difficult and require legal support (Di Martino, 2017).

Despite the compulsory nature of the exam, according to some reports, many families choose not to take it, finding different ways to circumvent the law. The exact number of families who do not take the exam is not easy to find, nor is the number of those who choose to take it on payment at institutions, often private ones (Leali, 2020). Moreover, no data are available on the general behaviour of the courts with regard to suitability examinations. Some peculiar episodes are described on the web, such as the one that recently involved a family in Bolzano, and that testifies to the compulsoriness and importance of the examination for admission to the next school grade as a form of guarantee of the learning process. The family obtained the annulment of the sentence that imposed control by the social services and their daughter's reintegration into the school system only after she had registered for the examination (Leali, 2023).

Facts such as these demonstrate how the issue remains controversial and debated between institutions and families and within homeschool groups.

4. The research

The increase in homeschooling practice in Italy raises questions of various kinds, including that of assessment. The heated debate between homeschooling families and public institutions generates questions as to how schools monitor children's learning. Given the lack of specific contributions and the relevance of the topic in educational research, exploratory research was conducted in the primary school through which the following questions were attempted to be answered:

RQ1: What examination methods are adopted in schools for homeschooled students?

RQ2: What are the choices made by families concerning holding or not holding the examination and the possible location?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of the school staff involved in the assessment process?

The research attempts to answer these questions by examining the issue from different perspectives: families, teachers, and headteachers (Table 1). The triangulation of data from different studies on the same subject is useful for grasping the complexity of the phenomenon.

The article presents the results obtained from three studies conducted in the provinces of Vicenza and Padua, which are close to each other and located in the north of the country. The only official document available to

us concerning this area (MIM-USR Veneto, 2023) returns us to an area where homeschooling realities resembling small public schools rather than home education managed by parents are widespread. The studies were mixed method and carried out between December 2023 and May 2024. Specifically, Research 1 investigated the phenomenon from the point of view of families; Research 2 the point of view of teachers and headteachers; and Research 3 replicated the family survey by collecting some testimonies from teachers, too. No experiences of unschooling were found in the research. The collected data will be presented as follows: first, the data from families, followed by those from the school staff: headteachers and teachers.

Table 1. Participants and data collection

Participants	Tools	Data collection	Themes explored	Responses
Families	Semi structured questionnaire	Administration of questionnaire and data analysis	Demographic information; Educational choices about final examination of children	40
Headteachers	Structured interview	Recording and transcription of interviews and analysis	Admission and final examination procedures for home-schooled children	8
Teachers	Semi structured questionnaire	Administration of questionnaire and data statistical analysis	Personal experience and opinions about final examination	24

4.1 Data collection and analysis

Families

Researches 1 and 3 included families residing in the provinces of Vicenza and Padua with one or more children between the ages of 6 and 11 who practise homeschooling for a total of 40 subjects (intended as families). The semi-structured questionnaire administered to the families was developed in collaboration with a pedagogic expert in homeschooling projects. The first section of the questionnaire collects general demographic information, while the second focuses on the educational choices and the final assessment methods adopted. The questions concerning the assessment involve multiple-choice answers and explore whether or not the examination was held, the location, and the type of examination. The questionnaire was administered via the Google Forms platform to facilitate dissemination and make data collection immediate. The sensitivity of the context and the difficulty of reaching the sample required, after an initial sharing of the questionnaire within a local homeschooling group of 486 members, required a snowball sampling. The collected data were then statistically analysed.



The family results, derived from Research 1 and 3, are jointly presented below.

The 40 families considered have an average of 1.17 children aged between 6 and 11 years, corresponding to the primary school age group, for a total of 47 children involved in homeschooling. The distribution of children by class, according to age, is as follows: class one (13); class two (13); class three (6); class four (6); class five (9).

37 families (upon 40) considered taking the final examination. Those who take the examination choose different venues: 24 families take it at a legally recognised private body, 6 at a state comprehensive school outside the province or region, 5 at a state comprehensive school in their municipality of residence or neighbouring districts, and 2 at a parity school.

Further data concerns the mode of the examination. Five types were identified within the research. In 31.8% of the cases considered, the examination consists of a test shared and co-designed between the school/examining body and the family; 27.3% involve an exposition of content chosen by the child; in 27.3% of the cases, the examination is a structured test based on the individual pathway taken by the child during the year. In 4.2% of the cases, the examination involves a test structured by the school or the host institution. In comparison, only 2.1% of the sample is assessed through the presentation of a logbook written by the family during the year. The remaining 6.8% of the sample state that families do not know how the final examination is conducted.

School staff

Research 2 included headteachers and teachers from state comprehensive schools located in the province of Vicenza in the sample. The participants were selected through random sampling. A request for participation was sent to 15% of the institutes in the area, for a total of 11 headteachers. Three of the surveyed headteachers did not participate; therefore, the sample included eight headteachers. A face-to-face interview was conducted with each headteacher. The interview included two questions on homeschooling: the possible admission of homeschooled children to the institution for the proficiency examination and the procedures used by the institution for the conduct of the examination. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Primary school teachers were selected by convenience sampling, and 24 questionnaires were collected (after a pilot study conducted with 6 teachers). The questionnaire included 16 questions, mostly open with a few dichotomic questions (yes/no) to introduce some open questions. The questionnaires included a section dedicated to assessing homeschoolers by investigating their experience in conducting proficiency examinations (mode of conduct, type of tests administered, period, any comparisons with families, any problems that emerged, personal opinions). Again, the questionnaire was administered via the Google Forms platform.

The data collected on the experiences of headteachers and teachers were analysed using the Atlas.ti tool to make them easier to read.

Research 3 investigated the assessment issue in the homeschooling experience through the testimonies of two educational figures identified through accidental sampling: a teacher from a state school who was on the board of assessment of homeschoolers and a teacher from a community learning centre. A semi-structured interview was administered to investigate the topic of assessment and examinations. Again, the collected data were subsequently analysed with Atlas.ti.

Concerning the school's experience with homeschooling about the final assessment process, eight headteachers state that they welcome or have welcomed homeschoolers in the past to take the annual proficiency examination, while four had no experience with this. Six of the interviewed headteachers are aware that many families choose to have the examination taken at a private institution and interpret this choice as an avoidance of the public school. With regard to the choice of examination venue, the teacher from a community learning centre interviewed (Research 3) confirms that all children in her reality take the examination at a private institution.

The choice, contrary to the management's thinking, however, is said to derive from the desire to make the examination mode consistent with the children's educational and teaching habits.

Within the five institutes where examinations for admission to the next school grade are held or have been held, the method proves to be homogeneous, in line with the ministerial indications, but at the same time attentive to the child's progress. The headteacher sets up an assessment board made up of the teachers competent in the subject areas assessed. The board prepares two written tests, one in Italian and one in mathematics, and an oral interview. The examination is structured based on the tests taken for the reference class, and the child's learning path during the homeschooling year is considered according to the family's indications.

Regarding teachers, the 24 completed questionnaires reveal that the majority (15) had no prior experience with homeschooling families or children. The remaining 9 had some experience, though only 4 of them were involved in committees responsible for evaluating homeschooled students.

According to 5 teachers of the sample, the assessment is based on formal tests and is not a global process involving the family; 3 state that they are not aware of the assessment method; according to 2 teachers, the dialogue with the family and the child's degree of maturation is considered. However, with respect to knowledge or thought referred to in the assessment process, a marked abstentionism emerges: 14 teachers, in fact, does not answer.

Awareness of the assessment process in practice is also generally limited. Only 35.5% are aware of setting up a special committee and administering two written and one oral test based on what the corresponding class has done and the child's progress. 23.5% state that they have had no experience and are not aware of the assessment procedure for homeschoolers; 11.8%, although they have no experience, report a general knowledge of how the procedure works, while 29.2% abstain and do not respond.

Knowledge referring to the type of tests administered is also poor. 9 teachers state that they do not know the type of examination while the remaining 15 are aware that the tests concern mathematics and Italian and that an oral interview is added to these. Only two teachers state that they assess the pupil globally, considering the canonical tests and the child's personal experience.

With respect to the presence or absence of a dialogue between school and family prior to the test, 10 teachers state that they are not aware of this aspect; 11 confirm that there is a dialogue between the two educational agencies; according to 3 teachers, on the other hand, there is no dialogue between school and family. Despite this, 22 teachers said they encountered no problems during the assessment procedures.

Finally, a final question was devoted to the teacher's perception of the children in homeschooling. Among the ten teachers who had the opportunity to deal with these children, five report poor social-relational skills and poor respect for rules due to the lack of opportunities to get together. Two report inferior educational preparation compared to their peers, while three teachers consider the homeschooling experience positive for learning. In addition to this data, other data were collected in the interview from Research 3. The teacher interviewed reports having participated in the assessment board and having supervised the examinations of around ten children, differentiated according to the class attended. For the first, second and third classes, the examination consists of a presentation of material produced by the child and an oral interview. In contrast, in the fourth and fifth classes, the presentation is supplemented with written tests in Italian, mathematics and English, also in oral form. In addition to the tests taken, the board considers the child's behaviour during the examination as an integral part of the assessment. The teacher, based on her own experience, believes that these children are generally unprepared compared to the pupils in the corresponding class; however, they all passed the examination with a level no higher than intermediate⁴.

5. Discussion

Overall, the data collected made it possible to answer the research questions or, at least, to advance reflection on the topic of assessing pupils' learning in homeschooling and the relationship between homeschooling contexts and traditional schools in the field of assessment.

According to headteachers and teachers, the *methods adopted for school assessment* (RQ1) align with what has been defined at the ministerial level. The written language and mathematics tests are constructed on the basis of the experience with children of the same age in traditional classes. At the same time, the oral test seeks to enhance the pupil's personal journey, which is also given by the dialogue with the family. The fact that emerges strongly, however, is the non-response to the question, which suggests a lack of preparation on the part of teachers on the subject. The number of pupils who take the examination annually is probably not that high. The headteacher prefers to ask a few teachers to get involved in it, considering them somewhat of a guarantor of the procedure. In general, no problems were reported during the examination, and substantial dialogue with families was declared. The teacher interviewed in Research 3 reported good experience in procedures of this kind, also specifying some differences in the conduct of the examination depending on the primary school year of reference. For younger children, for example, it was planned to have the children present some products and an oral interview. An experienced school head emphasises the need for tighter controls on the actual teaching (who and how they do it).

Now, with the simple application made by 30 March, where the simple syllabuses are declared, which are almost always the curricula that we have produced and posted on the site and copied (I find myself, especially in recent years, copying curricula from the internet), it is neither in heaven nor on earth. There should be more precise verification.

Headteachers are especially concerned about the inclusion of children with disabilities. In public schools, these children follow individualised programmes with support teachers, but in homeschooling realities, this possibility of being personally supervised is lost unless parents provide additional financial support.

With respect to the choices made by the families as to whether or not to take the exam and where it should be held (RQ2), almost all the families have their children take the final examination. Of these, most choose a legally recognised private institution to do so or, in any case, travel outside the province. Few turn to the state comprehensive school in their municipality of residence. According to the parents' reports, the school prepares an exam that takes into account the child's schooling during the year, for instance, by having the child present content chosen by him or by co-designing the test with the family. Residual is the presentation of a logbook drawn up by the family during the year, which, in any case, should have been studied in depth because we have no data on its contents and how it was managed. From a pedagogical point of view, the potential of documentation is well known, but the value should still be recognised by everyone, teachers and parents alike. Some families state that they do not understand how the final examination is conducted (which also adds up to a good percentage of teachers who do not know the choices of their institute concerning homeschooling students). The most evident fact, however, is that families do not cite written tests and interviews as defined by national regulations, except for a structured test constructed based on the individual pathway taken by the child during the year. It can be assumed that in the 'friendly' schools mentioned above (Leali, 2022), an attempt is made to make the most of the pupil's individuality. However, it is unclear how a ministerial procedure can be circumvented. Families are not precisely informed about the procedure, and the children are nevertheless subjected to the tests prescribed

by the regulations. On the other hand, we know that some families try to avoid the state's demands concerning annual examinations (Di Martino, 2022).

Compared to the sample in Research 2, many headteachers consider the choice of having the examination taken at a private institution an avoidance of the state school. We do not know, however, whether this is linked to the difficulty of the examination at the traditional school or to families' perceptions that the examination does not take into account the child's progress in homeschooling.

The perceptions of the school staff involved in the assessment process are not entirely positive (RQ3). Weak social-relational skills and poor respect for rules are reported due to the lack of opportunities for collaboration, both on the part of teachers and headteachers. Two teachers report inferior educational preparation compared to their peers, and even the teacher in Research 3 believes that children from homeschooling experiences are generally unprepared compared to pupils in the corresponding class despite a final examination level corresponding to intermediate. These teacher's words touch on different topics:

However, the child who came last year [to take the exam] was very lacking in socialisation, whereas the others in the community were used to being in a company [...]. In general, these children are very full of themselves, and their parents gratify them; they think they are very well prepared. However, they lack language structure, and they make spelling mistakes... Public school children, on the other hand, manage to overcome certain obstacles through frustration and improve themselves more and more.

Teachers' experiences differ, however. For example, three teachers (Research 2) consider the homeschooling experience positive for learning. It is always challenging to compare the pathway of students from traditional schools with that of homeschooled students because oftentimes, materials and methodologies used are really different, and so are the attitudes and involvement of families in everyday school life. As reported by the teacher in Research 3, for example, choosing a 'friendly' school would derive from the desire to make the examination mode consistent with the children's educational and teaching habits. Indeed, it seems complex to evaluate the path of a child one does not know, perhaps if one compares it with the path taken by children of the same age with whom one has worked for a whole school year. Some research would not confirm the difficulties of homeschooled children. Some research, which is not recent, reports an adequate level of university preparation by homeschooled children (Martin-Chang, Gould & Meuse, 2011; Martinez, 2015), while others consider the homeschooling experience to be nonetheless valuable for socialisation (e.g. Pazhwak, Ulfat & Qaderi, 2022).

The topic uniting the three research questions is precisely assessment. Children in homeschooling are assessed at the end of each school year according to precise ministerial indications and, at least in state schools, are compared with their age peers, effectively comparing two possibly very different paths with the same instruments and assessment criteria. The results, according to state school teachers, are not encouraging. It is precisely the assessment that determines the choices of families with children in homeschooling as to where to have their child take the annual exam, seeking an environment that will allow the full appreciation of the pathway taken. Again, the assessment determines a substantially negative perception of homeschooling children by the teachers interviewed.

Concerning the annual proficiency examination, the responsible parental reality tells:

I call it an exam now, but we do not call it that with the children. As they go through school serenely throughout the year, it is only right that they also arrive at the end, at such an important time for them, with all their serenity, so they know that every year there is a group of curious teachers who do not know our materials and want to come and

learn new things. And so the children prepare a fantastic exhibition, where they bring the materials and explain to the teachers how they make the additions [...] and the children do it with great serenity.

From the data collected, we can consider assessment one of the key elements to understanding the connections and contaminations between homeschooling and traditional schooling beyond personal choices and values on the part of families. Chinazzi (2020) already highlighted the importance of assessment.

The openness to individual needs and specificities that homeschooling realities declare to keep well in mind in their educational proposals and that they pursue through active modalities that make exploration and research two cornerstones must be supported, in fact, by continuous observation processes by the use of feedback and mainly unstructured assessment modalities, far from the caging and form an exam-oriented education system (Engchun, Sungtong & Haruthaithanasan, 2018; Neuman & Oz, 2020). The perspective is a formative assessment that accompanies learning processes and focuses on improvement while respecting individuality to the extent that it can be oriented towards future learning. We could not find any research that emphasises the role of formative assessment in homeschooling. We also know from previous research (Restiglian & Busato, 2024) that assessment is rejected and, consequently, not implemented, as it is considered an element that influences the pupil's motivation and self-esteem and could, consequently, block learning processes. Still, formative assessment, also in its declination in favour of the student as an assessment for learning (Broadfoot et al., 1999; Restiglian & Grion, 2019), is also an integral part of the traditional school curriculum. We consider this connecting point important and may lead to further insights.

6. Conclusion

The qualitative structure of the research presented, with a limited number of respondents and differences between the different realities, does not allow the generalisation of the results presented. However, bearing in mind, at least in our survey area, it is really difficult to bring homeschooling realities closer together.

The presented study tried to relate the assessment methods activated in homeschooling realities with the traditional ones, convinced that hints for a richer and more respectful dialogue between different realities could emerge. On the one hand, homeschooling families and the operators working in them are not aware of the importance of assessment for learning processes; on the other hand, teachers in traditional schools struggle to recover the purely formative dimension of assessment linked to an active and participative way of doing school. Families' reasons for homeschooling are diverse and often linked to their home territory. Excluding strong choices such as religious and value-based ones, it is often an escape from school problems (child's special needs, bullying incidents, misunderstandings with teachers) that would perhaps not have been made if traditional schooling had been deemed acceptable. Sometimes, the escape is temporary; sometimes, the choice becomes permanent (Kostelecká, 2010). From a research point of view, we tried to understand how traditional schooling can improve. Researching schooling, in fact, also means trying to outline what could be suitable for the school 'for all' because, in any case, the fundamental aspect that any educational institution must pursue is that the child can be placed at the centre of his or her learning process and that he or she can get along well with teachers and classmates while expressing his or her best.

The recent introduction of summary judgments linked to descriptors of attained learning levels (Ministerial Order No. 3/2025) has not diminished the pedagogical commitment to formative assessment and the continuous enhancement of both the educational process and student learning outcomes—elements that must remain foundational to effective teaching practice.

Considering the principle that attention to the learning process should underpin any educational pathway, it is important to recognize that issues concerning student well-being and school quality are not exclusive to the context of homeschooling. Rather, these concerns are integral to all educational settings. As such, they may serve as a productive ground for dialogue between homeschooling and traditional schooling models, with the child's well-being remaining central to both pedagogical approaches and regulatory frameworks.

The insights provided in this contribution also open the door to further lines of inquiry, such as investigating families' perceptions of school assessment, examining how teachers communicate students' learning processes during parent-teacher meetings and through administrative documentation, and exploring the collection of evidence for the purpose of documenting the students' educational trajectories. It can be hypothesized, in fact, that dialogue around assessment may contribute to clarifying and strengthening the relationship between school and family, thereby having a significant impact on students' academic outcomes.

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Note

1. Research and studies by institutes and associations directly related to homeschooling experiences, such as the National Home Education Research Institute [NHERI], were not considered.
2. A parity school is a non-state school that, on request and under certain conditions, is recognised by the State as having the same status as State schools. Catholic parishes or organisations often run parity schools.
3. L'Associazione Istruzione Familiare.
4. Since 2020, grades have no longer been awarded in primary schools in Italy, but rather descriptive judgements in periodic and final assessments against objectives related to different levels of learning: advanced, intermediate, basic, and in the first acquisition process. The Ministry of Education has recently introduced concise judgements.

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