

THE EVOLUTION AND TRANSFORMATION OF HOME EDUCATION IN EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

Home education in Europe has a deeply rooted and diverse history, intricately linked to social, political, and cultural developments, while simultaneously reflecting the ongoing transformations of the educational landscape. From its earliest mentions in educational contexts, where a limited number of students received private instruction or were taught by exceptional tutors, home education was often a privilege reserved for aristocratic or affluent social strata. However, its development has also been closely tied to the needs of lower social classes in their pursuit of access to knowledge. Education outside institutionalized structures has consistently served as a counterpoint to formal schooling, at times reinforcing social differentiation and division, and at other times offering an alternative for those unable to attend traditional schools.

It also emerged as a pragmatic response to the social needs of each era, while challenging the traditional values upheld by the formal education system. Inevitably, its evolution has been shaped by broader political, social, and technological changes across Europe, adapting its form and character to the specific needs of each historical period and, in turn, reshaping conceptions and standards in education. As political and social priorities have shifted, home education has evolved into new forms aimed at broader social inclusion, gradually distancing itself from the rigid ideological frameworks of the past. The rise of technology has significantly influenced its form, with modern digital home education emerging as a new modality that transcends traditional boundaries of space and time. Incorporating elements of technology, it offers opportunities for personalized learning and creates new challenges around democracy and access to knowledge. Today, developments in home education extend beyond technological advances; they also reflect the ongoing need to redefine the relationship between knowledge, society, and educational institutions in Europe.

Keywords: Home education, private education, alternative forms of teaching, educational standards, education system, personalized learning

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Home education in Europe predates the institutionalization of national education systems, as it constituted the dominant mode of knowledge transmission and was closely associated with the upper social classes and the internal structures of the family. The educational process was organized as a mechanism of social distinction and ideological integration, simultaneously establishing modes of discipline, social hierarchies, and the reproduction of hegemonic values. The relationships between adults and children were embedded in a field of asymmetric power,

within which learning functioned as a tool for constructing subjectivities in accordance with the mandates of a class-defined culture of education. Knowledge remained exclusive, restricted, and closely tied to lineage, forming a code of cultural legitimation intended to reproduce social control. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the revival of interest in ancient Greek and Roman educational ideals reinforced the practice of home education, with instruction delivered by private tutors and scholars gaining prestige among aristocratic circles as a symbol of cultural superiority and social distinction (Green, 1990). The structure of education, organized around social class and gender, intensified structural inequalities, operating both as a mechanism of social exclusion and as an expression of hegemonic relations that defined access to education (Archer, 2013).

Home education has been closely intertwined with the cultural and institutional shifts that have shaped European history. In the era of feudalism and the Church's strong influence, education within the family context had a pronounced religious character, aimed primarily at the moral formation of the individual. The teacher-child relationship developed within a strict framework of guidance, where learning was linked to discipline and conformity to specific values. The reception of antiquity, especially during the Renaissance, enhanced the significance of individual instruction, with the philosophical traditions of Plato and Cicero influencing the formation of an educational ideal rooted in rhetoric, ethics, and personal cultivation. The revival of classical models, with their emphasis on rhetoric and philosophy, guided the direction of education, wherein personalized learning through tutors or philosophers in the home environment emerged as the central tool for personal development. Influenced by these traditions, individual instruction contributed not only to the development of intellectual skills but also to the moral dimension of the personality, linking education to the cultivation of virtue and social responsibility (Grafton & Jardine, 1986). Pedagogical reflection on the nature of teaching and the quality of the learning relationship recurred in every form of private instruction, highlighting the tensions between personal guidance and prevailing social norms. In private education, the teacher-student relationship was personal in character but often shaped by social and moral expectations rooted in the broader social context. While this relationship sought to foster personality development and ethical formation, it could not escape the social inequalities and discriminations associated with class and gender.

The formation of nation-states and the development of institutional public schools from the 18th century onward did not lead to the abolition of home education. On the contrary, it was redefined as a privileged alternative for members of the upper social classes, who continued to favor personalized and individualized instruction. At the same time, the state began to influence education by recognizing knowledge as a public good, thus shaping education both as a citizen's right and as a key mechanism for the national and social formation of individuals (Foucault, 1995; Tröhler, 2011). Private education within the home remained a viable form of education for those with the financial means and social standing, allowing them to shape their children's educational path according to their own values and expectations. Concurrently, the distinction between public and private education became more closely linked to ideological and social conceptions, such as social autonomy, religious identity, and the regulatory role of the state in the educational process (Hunter, 1994).

Modernity introduced the demand for universal education, reinforcing ideas of social equality and homogeneity, which in turn intensified debates surrounding the meaning and legitimacy of

home education. From the 19th century onward, parents' ability to choose home education for their children increasingly clashed with state policies promoting compulsory education as a means of social integration and national cohesion (Bauman, 2000). Home education thus became part of a broader discourse on education and state policy, with each country approaching the limits of educational freedom in its own way. The pedagogical relationship was reformulated, informed by contemporary references from scientific psychology and the need to institutionalize schooling, leading to a deep revision of earlier concepts of education and upbringing (Popkewitz, 2000).

In contemporary Europe, home education displays new characteristics, as the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of technologies and digital tools in individual learning. As a result, the boundary between school and home is becoming increasingly blurred, with learning acquiring more structured features embedded in everyday life (Williamson & Hogan, 2020). At the same time, there is growing legitimacy of home education in various countries, either as a form of alternative education or as a response to state educational policies. This practice is linked to sociological and ideological determinants, including religion, cultural identities, and trust in the state (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). Today, it is not merely a pedagogical practice but also a form of social and political positioning, one that reactivates questions about the role of the state, family autonomy, and the very nature of learning.

2.0 MONASTIC AND ECCLESIASTICAL EDUCATION, ARISTOCRATIC COURTS, AND SELECTIVITY

During the European Middle Ages, home education emerged as a form of learning intrinsically linked to social hierarchy, religious dominance, and the political structures of the time, enforcing the exclusion of the lower social strata from participation in the educational process. At the threshold of the Roman Empire's decline and the rise of feudal relations, knowledge was stripped of any public dimension and became concentrated within limited domains of intellectual authority, primarily monasteries and royal courts, where education was determined by power relations and religious oversight (Le Goff, 1980).

Monastic and ecclesiastical education became the near-exclusive mechanism for transmitting scholarly tradition, strictly regulating access to knowledge and shaping the meanings of learning within the framework of theological dominance. Libraries, scriptoria, and schools developed within monastic communities did not merely serve as vessels for intellectual cultivation but operated as institutions for disciplinary formation in the realm of education. They defined the content and boundaries of knowledge according to ecclesiastical priorities. Through strict curatorship of manuscripts and the selective reproduction of texts, education was constructed as a privileged domain of scholars incorporated into the institutional body of the Church, effectively preventing any expansion of intellectual horizons beyond the sanctioned orthodoxy (Southern, 1997). The concept of home education thus assumed a character of strict religious instruction, closely tied to the spiritual supervision exercised by clergy. It was not an independent form of pedagogy, but a practice fully embedded within the institutional and doctrinal framework of ecclesiastical authority. Learning, stripped of any emancipatory or dialectical element, was oriented toward moral conformity and the shaping of individuals aligned with the monastic ideal. The theological framework of knowledge left no room for individual interpretation or critical thinking, and every educational act functioned as

a reproduction of established dogma, reinforcing discipline and virtue as fundamental values of spiritual life (Verger, 2013).

This model, however, was not limited to religious institutions. In aristocratic households, home education was closely associated with class distinctions and the need to reproduce power. The upbringing of young nobles was entrusted to personal tutors, often clergymen or highly educated scribes, who taught grammar, rhetoric, Latin, and ecclesiastical music. The content of instruction did not serve a universal educational claim but was instead tailored to the logic of social differentiation, reinforcing class boundaries and ensuring the reproduction of power within a rigidly structured cultural and political framework (Baschet, 2018). Education was not a means of personal empowerment but a tool for integrating individuals into the cultural norms of the ruling class. Its content revolved around codes of honor, obedience, and chivalric virtue, which defined the identity and obligations of those in higher social positions (Bloch, 2014). The exclusivity extended beyond access to home education, it affected its content and purpose as well. Men, especially young nobles, were educated to assume roles in governance, administration, military command, or ecclesiastical leadership. Women, who less frequently received such instruction, were usually restricted to domestic educational frameworks focused on skills deemed useful for household management and the transmission of Catholic moral values (Holloway, Wright, & Bechtold, 1990).

This nature of education reinforced the class-based segregation of knowledge, as home education functioned as a mechanism for excluding lower social classes from access to learning, deepening a structural asymmetry in the realm of knowledge. Rural populations, confined to agricultural production and deprived of literacy, perceived education not as a dynamic possibility but as a privilege reserved for the few (Illich, 1971). Illiteracy was not the result of negligence, but a condition institutionalized by design. Although the Church occasionally provided basic instruction to novices or a small number of boys destined for the lower clergy, it retained knowledge as the exclusive domain of the educated elite (Rüegg, 2004).

An interesting differentiation in the medieval educational landscape is found in the case of Charlemagne, who, influenced by the reformist spirit of Alcuin and the literary patronage tradition, sought to revive educational life in the courts by supporting home education through the establishment of palace schools (Riché, 1978). At his court in Aachen, a school was founded for the children of nobles as well as for members of the clergy, with an emphasis on the study of the seven liberal arts and the reading of classical texts. However, this initiative did not disrupt the principle of social selectivity. Charlemagne's reform did not question the elitist nature of home education; rather, it aimed to enrich its content with elements from ancient Greek and Roman tradition (McKitterick, 1989). His educational endeavor aimed to strengthen state cohesion by forming a unified educational system for the upper classes. Despite his intentions, the distinction remained between those educated to assume administrative or ecclesiastical positions and those relegated to supportive roles in society. Thus, even when education was extended to children from lower social classes through monastic avenues, it remained primarily geared toward the needs of the dominant social strata.

Medieval home education cannot be analyzed independently from the complex interplay of power, knowledge, and faith. The structure of the educational system was grounded in the strict

surveillance of instructional content, the enforcement of behavioral norms for students, and a complete detachment from the concept of universal education. Instruction conducted in private spaces, such as monasteries or aristocratic estates, served not only practical needs but also functioned as an ideological apparatus of reproduction, one that preserved and reinforced the theocratic and feudal structures of the medieval world (Gumbrecht, 1997).

3.0 THE EMERGENCE OF HOME EDUCATION AS A HUMANIST IDEAL

The Renaissance, as a profound cultural and epistemological rupture in European history, brought back to the fore the value of human reason, individual consciousness, and classical education, promoting an anthropocentric model that transcended the heteronomous structures of the Middle Ages. The return to ancient Greek and Roman ideals, through the study of classical texts and the reconstruction of the ideal of *Paideia*, restored the value of home learning as a domain of moral and intellectual formation. The notion of education was redefined and acquired a new meaning, no longer as preparation for monastic life or obedience to theological dogma, but as a process of inner development, cultural self-awareness, and participation in public discourse (Kristeller, 1965; Garin, 1957).

Home education during the Renaissance was linked to the rise of the *homo literatus*, a type of person shaped through the study of ancient authors and the cultivation of language, virtue, and sensitivity to the common good (Schipperges, 1977). The humanist model, as it developed through the academies and intellectual circles of Italy and Northern Europe, was based on fostering an environment sheltered from the material demands of daily life and oriented toward spiritual cultivation. Learning was not seen as detached from life but organically integrated into it, forming a way of being in which education became a central element of both personal refinement and social formation (Grendler, 1991). References to Plato and Cicero were not merely expressions of admiration for antiquity but reflected a deliberate selection of models. Education expanded to include the teaching of philosophy, rhetoric, and administration, with the goal of shaping an individual capable of clear thinking, effective communication, and assuming public responsibility. This selection was not neutral; it responded to the dominant classes' need to prepare a type of educated individual able to serve the administrative apparatus without challenging the structure of power.

The contributions of Erasmus, Vives, and Montaigne was pivotal in establishing home education as a form of humanistic formation. Erasmus, especially in his work *De pueris statim ac liberaliter instituendis*, advocates for a gentle, personalized, and morally grounded education, criticizing the authoritarian and rigid norms of institutional schooling (Erasmus, 1531/1998). He emphasizes the importance of early education within the home environment, focusing on familiarity with language, logic, and ethical virtues. Juan Luis Vives, in *De institutione feminae Christianae*, highlights the possibility of systematic and organized education within the home, even for women, challenging the traditional invisibility of female figures in the educational process (Vives, 1524/2007). Montaigne, in his *Essais*, underscores the value of the personal relationship between student and teacher, arguing that education should not be confined to standardized processes but grounded in open dialogue, the teacher's example, and the encouragement of reflective inquiry. He maintains that teaching must allow the student to develop independent thought and critical reasoning, free from imposed patterns that homogenize learners (Montaigne, 1572/1993).

During the Renaissance, home education was recognized not merely as a means of knowledge transmission but as a space for moral and intellectual guidance. The educator was not viewed as an external authority figure but as a spiritual companion who shaped consciousness through their ethos, example, and relationship with the learner. The educational process thus became a guided journey of self-awareness taking place within the home, a familiar, protected space intimately connected to personal life (Copenhaver & Schmitt, 1992). In contrast to the impersonal and mechanistic nature of early public education, home learning allowed for the shaping of personality as an integrated whole of reason, emotion, and virtue.

The humanist values that emerged during the Renaissance laid the foundation for the modern educational paradigm. Learning was now conceived as a tool for forming free and responsible citizens capable of integrating into the social body with critical thinking and autonomy. Although not a widespread norm, home education retained a pivotal role as a model of educational idealism, where inner cultivation led to outward action (Grafton & Jardine, 1986). The transition from private self-cultivation to socially beneficial participation was not a rupture but a natural consequence of the humanist conception of the self as an active and conscious agent.

The individualized nature of home learning contributed to the development of a sense of personal autonomy and critical thinking, traits that became central to modern understandings of knowledge and personal development. Emphasis on individual progress, cultivation of personal thought, and ethical autonomy laid the groundwork for early philosophical and political notions of the individual as a self-governing and responsible actor (Taylor, 1992). Education functioned not only as a social mechanism but also as a site of identity formation, with home learning offering the space and time for such inner processes that were difficult to replicate in mass schooling.

The idea of home education as an ideal of autonomy and intellectual mentorship crystallized through a synthesis of humanist values, classical educational models, and social aspiration. Despite its clearly class-bound character, it served as a precursor to modern concepts of personalized learning, educational autonomy, and self-directed development. The Renaissance elevation of home education was not a regressive return to the past, but a significant step in shaping the modern conception of education as an act of freedom and consciousness. The emphasis on learning within the familial or domestic sphere, defining education as a personal process, affirmed the value of student autonomy and the cultivation of critical thinking, highlighting the importance of education for personal growth and the formation of conscious citizens (Illich, 1971).

4.0 THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF NATION-STATES

The transition from aristocratic and humanist home education to public, state-organized forms of schooling during the final two centuries of the Ancien Régime was not merely a technical change in instructional systems; it signified a fundamental transformation in conceptions of social structure, knowledge, and state responsibility. In the early modern period, education remained a privilege of the aristocracy and the urban elite. It was grounded in a close personal relationship between teacher and student, in an environment that promoted moral refinement, rhetorical training, and the study of classical literature often modeled on the Renaissance ideal of the *homo universalis* (Grafton, 2011). Despite its sophistication, the humanist tradition of

private education excluded broader social groups, maintaining a stark division between the upper and lower classes.

The intellectual upheaval brought about by the European Enlightenment shifted the focus of education from the elite individual to the citizen of the state. Thinkers such as Condorcet advocated universal and systematic education, founded on the equality of human beings as rational entities and on the vision of a political body capable of active participation in public life (Condorcet, 1976). Education ceased to be the exclusive privilege of nobles and began to be conceived as a tool for shaping the citizen, while still retaining elements of the moral educational ethos of the previous century.

Pestalozzi, for his part, promoted an educational model grounded in the cultivation of moral conscience and individual development, emphasizing love, instructional adaptability to children's needs, and the value of experiential knowledge (Pestalozzi, 1801). Teaching was no longer to be based solely on top-down knowledge transmission, but rather structured around the active participation of the student, bringing embodied experience and a sense of belonging to the forefront. This approach had a significant impact on early national education systems, which came to be seen not as instruments for maintaining social hierarchy, but as means of fostering national unity and homogeneity.

Simultaneously, Herbart's pedagogy introduced a framework that integrated psychology into the instructional process, aiming to provide a scientific foundation for education as a mechanism for intellectual and moral development. His theory was based on the idea of multiple representational reinforcement and the gradual construction of knowledge through the linking of new concepts to preexisting ones (Herbart, 1806). This framework provided early state curricula with a sense of systematization and organizational structure, designed not merely to transmit content, but to shape characters capable of adapting to the needs of the national whole.

The state-organized forms of education that emerged in the 19th century responded both to the ideology of rationalism and progress and to the needs of the modern state to produce disciplined, competent, and law-abiding citizens. The institutionalization of education was a strategic choice by the newly formed nation-states, which recognized that linguistic unity, historical narrative, and moral culture were shaped through educational processes (Green, 1990). Over time, home education was marginalized, while the family continued to play a key role in upbringing. However, the school took on a decisive role in the ideological and social integration of the individual.

The shift from private education to the universality of national systems was neither linear nor untroubled. Resistance from local communities, differing economic and cultural contexts, and the need to manage political legitimacy within states created a complex field of transition. Nevertheless, the unified, compulsory, and state-regulated school became the new domain in which conceptions of knowledge, authority, and social mobility were redefined (Tröhler, 2011). The establishment of national curricula and the creation of educational evaluation institutions made it clear that education no longer existed merely as a formative process, but as a mechanism for national formation and normative homogenization.

The progressive establishment of compulsory schooling in the 19th century, especially following the reforms of Jules Ferry in France and of Humboldt and Schulze in Germany, marks the historical transformation of the school from a marginal institution of bourgeois society into a foundation of the nation-state (Compayré, 1904; Nath, 2003). This was not simply a technical restructuring of education, but the formation of a new relationship between citizen and authority, forged through the control of knowledge, the institutionalization of discipline, and the standardization of language, ethics, and historical memory.

5.0 CONTEMPORARY TRANSFORMATIONS OF HOME EDUCATION IN EUROPE

Although historically associated with the ruling classes, aristocracy, and private education, home education has been reshaped in modern European societies, acquiring new characteristics, ideological orientations, and support from digital tools. Developments relating to the shift toward personalized learning models, educational freedom policies, and technological mediation have reintroduced home education as a dynamic point of convergence between the alternative and institutional functions of educational systems.

This contemporary “return” to home education does not merely reproduce old forms of instruction but arises as a response to new socio-political conditions that have emerged in recent years. The COVID-19 pandemic was a decisive catalyst, with the need for social distancing and the interruption of traditional educational systems prompting immediate changes. The temporary necessity of remote learning during the pandemic brought about a radical shift in educational perceptions, with digital tools and technologies becoming essential for maintaining the learning process (Selwyn, 2021; Aissaoui, 2022).

The rise of neoliberal educational perspectives, favoring efficiency and privatization, has also contributed to the expansion of home education, presenting it both as a solution for enhancing learning and as a vehicle for advancing political and economic interests. Within this framework, home education appears to compete with traditional systems, absorbing students from vulnerable or marginalized groups and drawing strength from the digitization of education (Rancière, 2009; Ball, 2012).

As a form of education, home learning today represents a synthesis of traditional practices and contemporary innovations, creating a hybrid educational dimension that combines elements of the past with present-day needs and capabilities. In its first dimension, homeschooling assumes special importance, particularly among families who choose to withdraw from public education systems for ideological, religious, or pedagogical reasons. This choice is often driven by a desire to control the content of education, to promote a personal educational philosophy, or to avoid the contradictions and limitations of institutional schooling (Lubienski, 2003; Rothermel, 2015). Such home education is often characterized by strong parental involvement and individualized planning that highlights the child’s personality and aligns learning with family values (Hanna, 2011).

On the other hand, a new version of home education has emerged, closely tied to technocratic developments and the proliferation of digital tools in education. This includes online learning platforms and modern digital learning systems that deliver educational content via the internet and other digital media. Remote education, aligned with the European Union’s strategic goals for digital learning, offers new opportunities for accessing knowledge, extending education

across broader social and geographic spectra, and adapting learning to the needs of contemporary society (European Commission, 2020). Digital platforms and distance learning systems are increasingly integrated into structured educational models dependent on computational infrastructure and the efficiency of technological tools.

The shift toward educational digitization, particularly its integration into home learning, highlights the blend of tradition and innovation, offering a new dimension that fuses the intimacy of personalized instruction with a technological orientation. The EU's Digital Education Strategy calls for building infrastructure and enhancing digital competencies among all citizens, aiming to make learning more accessible and flexible on a global scale (European Commission, 2021).

The role of home education as a mechanism of either integration or detachment from public schooling varies significantly across countries. In France, despite a strong tradition of universal and secular education that separates religious from civil authority (*laïcité*), home education had long been legal. However, since 2021, amid debates over radicalization, strict regulations have been introduced, now requiring governmental approval for homeschooling (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale, 2021). In contrast, home education remains prohibited in Germany, where federal law interprets compulsory education as compulsory school attendance, not merely a duty to learn (Spiegler, 2010).

In the Netherlands, educational freedom is rooted in the historical struggle known as *schoolstrijd*, reflecting a longstanding cultural tradition of pluralism and independence in education. Legal recognition of the right to choose alternative ideological or pedagogical models allows families to adapt the learning process to their values and beliefs. Thus, home education functions not merely as an exception but as a recognized alternative form of learning, institutionalized with specific provisions, especially for families citing religious or philosophical incompatibility with conventional school environments (Van Bijsterveld, 2013).

In the United Kingdom, educational policy is based on the principle of compulsory education, without mandating school attendance. The notion of fulfilling the "duty to educate" (education otherwise) allows families to pursue alternative teaching methods, supporting the spread of home education. Thousands of children are educated outside of schools, either through individualized curricula or by leveraging digital tools. This practice is especially prevalent among families who cite religious, philosophical, or pedagogical reasons for avoiding formal schooling (Charles-Warner, 2024; Thomas & Pattison, 2008).

Forms of home education are far from homogeneous. The institutionalization of digital learning during the pandemic necessitated certain forms of compulsory home education, even in systems that had previously excluded them. Technology-supported remote learning gave rise to a new hybrid category of learner, one who studies at home but remains within the framework of public or private education. This intermediate instructional model, often characterized by a lack of institutional clarity, raises questions about educational equity, social inclusion, and continuity in the pedagogical process (Yin, 2022).

The dialectical relationship between modern home education and the elitist conception of learning reemerges through the lens of personalization. The ability to choose, the flexibility of schedules, and the tailoring of learning at each child's pace and needs are articulated as

pedagogical ideals but simultaneously generate conditions of exclusion. Access to material and cultural resources, parental competence, familiarity with regulatory frameworks, and digital connectivity all influence the success of these educational paths (Apple, 2006). The notion of the "educationally self-sufficient citizen" can function as a tool for reproducing social inequalities, masked as educational freedom (Yin, 2022).

Despite their variations in methods and social functions, modern forms of home education remain connected to their historical association with school access as a marker of social distinction and class privilege. Instead, they now operate within a new normative and political framework, where the idea of "educational choice" is promoted as a right and associated with individual freedom, differentiation, and personal responsibility for learning (Apple, 2004). While the pedagogical visions of Condorcet and Herbart emphasized the cultivation of an educated citizen capable of participating in public life and contributing to collective politics, contemporary forms of home education tend to align with models of personalized learning that prioritize adaptability, private initiative, and technological mediation as foundational elements of educational formation.

Since 2020, the European Union's educational policy has supported the potential of distance learning through initiatives such as the Digital Education Action Plan (European Commission, 2020). However, this shift has not resolved the challenge of pedagogical coherence or the role of schools as spaces of socialization. Home education is now simultaneously seen as both a challenge and an opportunity, depending on the degree of institutional flexibility within each national education system.

In the contemporary era, home education, intersecting with elitist practices, anti-systemic movements, and digitally mediated learning, reflects the evolving character of educational ideals in post-neoliberal Europe. In social contexts that continue to invest in the unity and coherence of public education, the rise of multiple alternative learning pathways highlights the tensions between the pursuit of institutional universality and the strengthening of educational trajectories rooted in individual initiative, technological capacity, and cultural differentiation. The critical question is no longer whether home education can coexist with public schooling, but whether these systems can critically reassess their foundational principles considering new pedagogical, social, and technological reconfigurations (Ball, 2003).

6.0 CONCLUSIONS - PROSPECTS AND CRITICAL REVIEW

Home education has not merely emerged as an alternative pedagogical option; it has actively contributed to shaping distinct forms of relationships between knowledge, educational structures, and the agents of learning. Its distinctiveness lies in its ongoing historical and institutional negotiation of the terms under which knowledge is accessed, disseminated, and interpreted, outside the confines of formal schooling. In doing so, it redefines the legitimacy, authority, and purpose of learning. Functioning often outside the boundaries of mass, institutionally organized education, it inherently carries the characteristics of a unique educational domain, where learning is not conceived as a universal public right, but as a private, selective undertaking. Throughout history, home education has functioned simultaneously as a site of cultural reproduction, elitism, and social distinction, as well as a dynamic counterexample to the singular narratives of state-defined education.

Across its historical trajectory, home education has operated not only as an alternative pedagogical practice but as a field of cultural reproduction and social stratification. At the same time, it has offered a powerful counter-narrative to the dominant educational discourse promoted by state institutions. As education has been shaped by the social, political, and economic conditions of each era, home education has incorporated differentiating features that highlight students' social standing and the cultural expectations of their families. In many cases, the choice to educate at home functioned not simply as a means of instruction, but as a mechanism for affirming family values and social status, reinforcing distinctions among social classes.

By assuming the role of resistance or differentiation from the dominant educational system, home education has often served as a space that questioned the rigid and restrictive narratives of state institutions. In periods of social upheaval or political reform, education beyond formal schooling provided opportunities for more flexible and personalized approaches to learning, while also allowing alternative perspectives on the values and ideas being transmitted. Home education thus reveals the possibility of forming new pedagogical and social outlooks that are not constrained by the limits of public schooling, fostering learning environments more closely attuned to the needs of learners and their families.

Its contemporary resurgence through modalities such as remote education, personalized learning, homeschooling, and digital learning environments does not simply represent a technological upgrade of an old model. Rather, it marks a return to a learning paradigm that redefines the relationship between public and private actors in education. Digital home education strongly reflects the technocratic mediation of learning, reinforcing individualization and the fragmentation of collective learning experiences, especially when adopted as a compulsory solution, as was the case during the pandemic (McLaughlan, 2020).

Its significance lies in its ability to form a field of tension between autonomy and social responsibility, between the freedom to design learning paths and the need for guaranteed, equitable access to knowledge. The historical association of home education with elite privilege and inequality cannot be overlooked, especially as it reemerges in contexts marked by digital fragmentation, economic disparity, or privatization of public educational functions. Expanding home-based learning models without meaningfully integrating them into democratic education systems carries the risk of reinforcing new forms of exclusion, as noted by researchers such as Ball (2003), Apple (2006), and Lubienski (2013).

Differences across countries, from selective recognition of home education as an institutional option in France or Germany to more open homeschooling models in the UK and Scandinavian countries, reveal the heterogeneity of national policies in addressing this phenomenon. The uncertainty about whether home education can serve democratic education while respecting diverse individual needs constitutes a central question in contemporary educational planning.

Its prospects will not be determined solely by technological adequacy or by its acceptance by society and the stakeholders of the education system. Rather, they will depend on the ability of public policy to incorporate home education within a framework where individualized learning does not lead to privatization but strengthens its connection to collective education. It is necessary to reconceptualize the terms under which home education can promote democracy,

universality, and coherence in the educational experience without reproducing privilege or isolation.

Reframing pedagogical discourse around learning outside institutional settings, recognizing the multiplicity of learners, and integrating home education into a unified, multidimensional learning system are challenges that concern not only the future of education but also the foundational values of democracy in Europe. These are contemporary challenges that demand a deeper reassessment of pedagogical models to ensure equitable access to knowledge and the inclusion of diverse social and cultural realities within the educational system.

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