

The challenges of academic research on Home Education in Brazil

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the main challenges of academic research on home education in Brazil today. Through a qualitative research approach, the elements listed for analysis derive both from the bibliographical research on the subject, as well as from the monitoring of actions towards the regulation of the practice of home education in the country. The predominant results are: the repeated use of common sense and generalizations about homeschooling; the academic community's reaction against the subject, which is associated with conservative projects of the current federal government; the need to expand dialogue and confront polarization around a movement that is complex; and the urgency of expanding academic research on homeschooling in order to strengthen the arguments in defense of public education.

Keywords: Home Education. Homeschooling. Academic research. Common sense.

Os desafios da pesquisa acadêmica sobre a Educação Domiciliar no Brasil

Resumo

O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar os principais desafios da pesquisa acadêmica sobre a educação domiciliar no Brasil na atualidade. Por meio de abordagem qualitativa de pesquisa, os elementos elencados para análise derivam tanto da pesquisa bibliográfica sobre o tema, como do acompanhamento das ações em prol da regulamentação da prática da educação domiciliar no país. Destacam-se como resultados predominantes: o uso reiterado do senso comum e generalizações em relação à educação domiciliar; a reação contrária da comunidade acadêmica sobre o tema que se encontra associado a projetos conservadores do atual governo federal; a necessidade de ampliação do diálogo e enfrentamento da polarização em torno de um movimento que se revela complexo; e a urgência da ampliação de pesquisas acadêmicas sobre a educação domiciliar visando ao fortalecimento dos argumentos em defesa da educação pública.



Palavras-chave: Educação Domiciliar. Homeschooling. Pesquisa acadêmica. Senso comum.

1 Introduction

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A¹ homeschooling, better known in the English version *homeschooling*, is a movement in which families choose to take their children out of school and teach them at home. Although it is legally recognized in more than 63 countries (VIEIRA, 2012) and there is a history of allowing its practice in Brazil (VASCONCELOS, 2017), after the Federal Constitution of 1988 (CF/88) there was a majority interpretation that part of school education is compulsory enrollment and attendance.

However, going in the opposite direction to the historical struggle for the expansion of access to school in the country, Brazilian families began to claim the right to teach their children at home. What started with a small number of parents claiming the freedom to educate their children at home has become a growing movement that, with the support of the National Association for Home Education (ANED), has achieved repercussions in society and demanded actions from the Judicial, Legislative and Executive branches (BARBOSA, 2016).

Recently, homeschooling gained evidence when President Jair Messias Bolsonaro (Liberal Party) presented it in 2019, through the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights, as a priority measure of the first hundred days of government, associating such theme to a series of measures related to the growth of movements of a conservative nature (PESSOA, 2019). At the end of this period, a Provisional Measure was not prepared, as had been promised, but, by the for the first time in the country's history, the president himself presented a Bill (PL 2401/2019) to the House of Representatives aiming to regulate the practice in the country.

¹This article is an expanded version of an opinion piece published in the blog of the Faculty of Education of the State University of Campinas. Available at: <https://www.fe.unicamp.br/fe-publica/publicacoes/entre-paus-e-pedras-os-desafios-de-pesquisar-sobre-educacao-domiciliar>. Accessed on: 07.Aug.2022.





The issue was again highlighted nationwide during the debate that took place on May 18, 2022, in the House of Representatives, about the urgency of voting on PL 2401/19, which provides for the exercise of the right to home education by amending Law No. 8069/90 (Statute of Children and Adolescents) and Law No. 9.394/96 (Law of Directives and Bases of National Education). After a series of debates, the Substitutive text prepared by the rapporteur Luísa Canziani (PSD-PR) was approved in the House of Representatives, giving rise to Bill No. 1338/2022, which is currently in progress in the Federal Senate.

As a result of these events, society's interest in the issue of homeschooling has become notorious. This has been widely reported by the media and there is a significant growth of groups on home education on social networks. However, many speeches and information disseminated have positions that reveal a lack of knowledge about the homeschooling movement. Given this context, this article aims to analyze the main challenges of academic research on home education in Brazil, in the current context.

2 Methodology

From a qualitative research perspective, the elements listed for analysis are the results both of the bibliographical research on the theme and of the monitoring of actions towards the regulation of the practice in the country. The bibliographical research was carried out at the CAPES theses and dissertations database and at the *Scielo* by means of the keywords: home education; *homeschooling*; de-schooling.

In addition to the analysis of the growing but still incipient literature in Brazil, several situations experienced in the debate on homeschooling within universities and research centers, in scientific events, among parliamentarians, among others, were also contemplated. Part of the materials analyzed refers to official notes from Brazilian entities on the subject, videos and websites of associations that are articulated in favor of the theme and others made available at the Observatory of Education Domiciliar e Desescolarização (OEDD), which enabled a broader incursion into the theme.





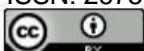
This set of information led us to speeches in favor of and against home education in Brazil. Thus, the analysis of such speeches proved to be important to verify "[...] in what perspectives the social power relationship is built in the discursive level" (ROCHA; DEUSDARÁ, 2005, p. 321), as well as to elucidate the obstacles that are presented to the academic research on the subject to evolve and actually contribute to the defense of public education.

3 Home Education and the Obstacles of Common Sense

A first major challenge for academic research on homeschooling is what we call "common sense attacks". Although this problem is unfortunately common to other subjects in different areas of knowledge, it has revealed itself in a marked way in the debates on homeschooling, in various spaces and from different perspectives.

In this sense, "common sense" is understood as an instrument of potentiality for the dissemination of discourses and conceptions that do not necessarily match reality, but that dialogue with the ideas and needs of the people who use them. Such conceptions are often the reproduction of what is heard by someone else, since, according to Fiorin (2006), "The enunciator, in order to constitute a discourse, takes into account someone else's discourse, he is not present in his own, therefore, every discourse is inevitably occupied, crossed by someone else's discourse" (p. 22). In this way, common sense ends up carrying a "fragmentary, incoherent, disjointed, implicit, degraded, mechanical, passive and simplistic" conception (SAVIANI, 1985, p.10).

Homeschooling is a movement characterized by the struggle for freedom of choice for families regarding the education of their children. In Brazil, one of the main arguments used in defense of the modality is linked to the attack on schools, especially Brazilian public institutions. Vasconcelos (2017) points out that these lines, many times, are adhered to "common sense" to advocate with the purposes of the groups that defend the movement, since, according to the author,





The alleged dissatisfaction with public schooling would be, therefore, more a repetition of slogans affectionate to "common sense" than the determining condition of this movement, since *homeschooling* would be much more related to the choices of the middle and upper social classes [...] than to the possibilities of users of public networks. (p. 132)

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In the debate that took place in the House of Representatives during the vote on the urgency regime of PL 2401/19², it was possible to hear attacks on public schools loaded not only with common sense linked to discourses on the lack of quality of institutions, but also generalizations that sought to consolidate the idea of failure of the school institution: "Thus, problems that affect society, in general, and that are also found in the school are used as arguments to justify the defense that this institution is in crisis" (LODI; BARBOSA, 2021, p. 94).

The repeated use of common sense presents itself as a difficulty for research on homeschooling, because it reveals, on the one hand, a resistance, both from its advocates and critics, to deepen the debate on the subject. On the other hand, it carries generalizations that prevent the analysis of the different perspectives present in the movement.

Common sense and generalizations are present, even among the critics of the homeschooling movement. As an example, when a debate on the subject is initiated, the first reaction is usually the accusation about the (*lack of*) socialization of children who do not go to school. The headline "Homeschooling puts a wall between the family and the social world" is one, among many others published by the press, with this view.

The argument regarding the absence or lack of socialization in homeschooling is also present in academic texts on the subject. Zan and Krawczyk (2020) state that this practice compromises the socialization of students; Ribeiro (2020) argues that school is necessary to provide elements of socialization that the family is not able to offer and that are fundamental to "maturing for citizenship aware of the rights and duties of life in society" (p. 9).

² Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rA2ex6r2QU8>. Accessed on: 25.July.2022

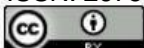




However, some elements stand in opposition to this widespread criticism. Parents who opt for *homeschooling* usually provide their children with opportunities for socialization through various curricular and extracurricular activities, through the families' learning proposals, or even in the interaction with "support groups" formed by supporters of the modality, as highlighted by the national and international literature. Such research also reveals that, because they do not spend many hours inside a school institution, children and adolescents *homeschooler sacabam having more time and possibilities to socialize with people of different ages (FARIA; BARBOSA, 2019; RAY, 2003); studies with adults homeschooler syndicate that the experiences in different contexts and public spaces outside school hours resulted in greater involvement in the community, performance in volunteer work, among other components that are presented as a consequence of socialization and training for social practice (VAN PELT et al., 2009).*

It is, however, a "selective" socialization, since parents are responsible for choosing with whom and how their children will relate to other people in society. However, in the case of Brazil, it is questionable whether these same children, belonging to families from more affluent social classes, would not already be in a private school chosen by their parents, socializing among "equals", in the name of an "educational freedom" allowed by law to those who can afford to make such choices. Thus, even if the socialization of homeschooled children is directed by their parents, the commonly made generalization that these children are necessarily deprived of broad social interaction because they do not attend school is incorrect.

Another "common sense attack" on the homeschooling debate has been its recent association with the remote education offered during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, it became commonplace to hear speeches that mistakenly linked the term homeschooling (or homeschooling) to remote education or distance learning. Several news headlines referred to pandemic education as being the same "teaching modality" as homeschooling: "Charlize Theron says she is stressed with *homeschooling*das children: I





prefer action scenes”³; “*Homeschooling X home office*: it is difficult to balance the challenges of quarantine”⁴; “*Homeschooling* in quarantine: famous people have new routines with their son's classes”⁵; among others.

Such a connection between the concepts can also be found in academic texts, such as the one by Guizzo et al (2020), who state that “*Delivery, takeaway, home office, and homeschooling* were immediately installed or intensified (at least, for the middle and upper classes) as ways to keep families at home” (p. 3) after the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic. However, it is important to emphasize that during the social isolation required in this period, the remote teaching adopted by most schools as an emergency measure and fight against contagion (NEVES; ASSIS; SABINO, 2021) meant the continuity of attachment to the school that was “transported” to the private environment of families, generating numerous challenges to children, parents and education professionals (ARAÚJO; PROGETTI; SANTOS, 2021).

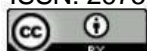
Thus, such understanding and dissemination of common sense using the terms homeschooling and remote education as synonyms are mistaken, given the very nature and definition of the *homeschooling* movement, which is the freedom of parents to make choices related to the education of their children regarding methods, curricula, learning spaces, among others.

Another generalization commonly present in the discussion about homeschooling, which is related to the supposed homogeneity of the groups and families that are part of the movement in defense of the practice, also stands out. Due to the current political scenario in the country, in which the theme is directly linked to the Brazilian conservative movement, a large portion of the population tends to believe that only fundamentalist religious groups choose to teach their children at home. Ribeiro

³Available at: <https://revistamonet.globo.com/Celebridades/noticia/2020/07/charlize-theron-diz-estar-estressada-com-homeschooling-das-filhas-e-que-prefere-fazer-cenas-perigosas-de-acao.html>. Accessed on: 08 Aug. 2022.

⁴ Available at: <https://www.metropoles.com/ponto-de-vista/homeschooling-x-home-office-e-dificil-equilibrar-os-desafios-da-quarentena>. Accessed on: 08 Aug. 2022.

⁵Available at: <https://revistaquem.globo.com/QUEM-News/noticia/2020/06/homeschooling-na-quarentena-famosos-falam-das-aulas-dos-filhos.html>. Accessed on: 08 Aug. 2022.





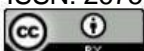
(2020), despite stating that it is a diverse group, generalizes homeschooling in Brazil by defining it as a movement in which practitioners "unite around an individualist-conservative perception of the world" (p. 8)."

However, according to Oliveira and Barbosa (2017), homeschooling is "[...] originating from a wide range of positions anti-statist, that pass for anarchist, individualist liberal, and fundamentalist religious positions, among others" (p. 194). International research reveals that the movement *homeschooling*tem has been marked by increasingly heterogeneous audiences, with families presenting different profiles and motivations to teach their children at home (SPIEGLER, 2010). In Brazil, although currently homeschooling is "supported and strengthened by parties, institutions and religious leaders aligned with the neoconservative movement" (CECCHETTI; TEDESCO, 2020, p. 13), the incipient research that addresses the characterization of Brazilian families practicing homeschooling do not point to a homogeneous group, despite the presence of majority common characteristics such as biparentality and high economic resources (VIEIRA, 2021; VASCONCELOS, 2021).

Thus, a series of generalizations and common sense dissemination have not contributed to the analysis of the complex movement that is home education. In this sense, academic research on the subject is essential to dispel the misconceptions present, whether in favor or against arguments.

4 Home education researchers versus proponents of the practice: the polarization and the difficulties of dialogue

During the process of attempting to regulate homeschooling in Brazil, which has intensified in recent years, there has been a lack of real dialogue between academics and researchers in the field of education, among others, with the proponents of the practice. The difficulty of establishing such a dialogue stems, among other factors, from the use of pseudoscientific discourses and the choice of arguments for the defense, whether of the





school or home education, which, as previously mentioned, are often based on common sense.

When browsing the website of the National Association for Home Education, in the tab entitled "Home Education" there is an area for academic papers on the subject. Within the repertoire of productions, one can find research that express divergent evaluations about the movement. According to Araujo and Leite (2020), one notices in ANED's positionings "a latent concern to break with the rhetoric of common sense to, from there, create the positive meaning of DE" (p. 7). Thus, it has been the role of the Association to demystify the false perceptions about families who practice home education, as well as to disseminate information about the history and performance of the movement for the regulation of the practice in the country.

However, despite this intent, when defending home education in detriment of school, representatives and people linked to ANED end up presenting a series of criticisms to Brazilian schools, which are permeated by unsubstantiated information, as presented above. When analyzing the business network formed around home education and linked to ANED, Araujo and Leite (2020) argue that, although their representatives try to "emphasize that it is not a conservative religious movement that curtails the teaching activity" (p. 11), some institutions linked to the Association disseminate in their materials speeches and arguments that end up "denying the science from an academic point of view" (p. 11).

On this aspect, it is convenient to resume the debate that occurred during the session of the House of Representatives that discussed the urgency of the vote on PL 2401/19. ANED shared on its social networks the speech given on that occasion by Congressman Lincoln Portela, when he accuses schools, in an unfounded and generalized way, of being niches of ideological indoctrination and teachers of inducing children to early sexuality.

Thus, the reaction of the academic community to homeschooling has generally been one of immediate denial, due, above all, to the attacks against the school institution and the association of the theme with the current federal government, which has





frequently disqualified public universities and the science produced there. As examples, one can cite the pronouncements of Abraham Weintraub, former Minister of Education, who claimed that public universities were a place of "shambles" and "mayhem"⁶, and of President Jair Messias Bolsonaro himself, who referred to the students of Brazil's public universities as one who "does everything but study"⁷.

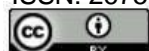
This context ends up contributing to the permanence and deepening of a polarized scenario, as well as an attitude of contempt of academics for the importance of scientific research on homeschooling. This reaction leads to the continuity of ignorance about the complexity of the movement and, therefore, the use of generalizations and common sense not only in the criticism and attacks on families and advocates of homeschooling, as already evidenced, but also in the defense made to the school.

The refusal and denial of homeschooling is frequent in academic environments and elsewhere - as occurred during the vote in the House of Representatives - through the argument that children should have access to schools for plural coexistence among people of different classes and religious beliefs, indicating what we have called discourses based on the "romanticization of school. In this sense, some points require further study, such as the very fact that families who choose to homeschool have financial resources that could, for example, be used for enrollment in a private denominational school that caters to people from an economic elite, where plurality would certainly not be present as manifested in the arguments. A similar analysis can be directed to public schools that, in large part and as a result of their devaluation by the government and the lack of investments, do not have the necessary financial resources to attend public schools has been able to offer a quality education aimed at the full development of the person.

Another aspect that deserves to be highlighted involves the quantitative and/or international research used to defend the practice and regulation of *homeschooling* on

⁶ Available at: <https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/educacao/balburbia-arruaca-mpf-processa-abraham-weintraub-por-ofensas-contras-universidades-publicas-1-24982900>. Accessed on: 09 Aug. 2022.

⁷ Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/to/tocantins/noticia/2019/12/12/em-evento-no-tocantins-jair-bolsonaro-diz-que-aluno-de-universidades-brasileiras-faz-tudo-menos-estudar.ghtml>. Accessed on: 09 Aug. 2022.





Brazil. As an example, Congresswoman Bia Kicis, in the discussion about the text of the bill 3179/12, mentioned that in the United States of America, the young people who pass the vestibular exams of the best universities are home-schooled students. Congressman Lincoln Portela's speech, on the other hand, pointed out that homeschooling has been a success in 65 countries, arguing, then, that regulating the practice in Brazil would raise the country's position in the International Student Assessment Program. In both situations there was no reference to the sources of the information presented.

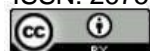
ANED's website also has a lot of statistical data. In the tab entitled "Questions and Answers", it points out that the academic results of homeschooling students are "15% to 30% higher than students in conventional schools".⁸ and, in other parts of the site, the good results in national evaluations are also highlighted.

The question is how quantitative and/or international research is used to support homeschooling in the country, disregarding the national scenario and reflections related to educational theories. Gatti (2004) states that it is necessary to understand the context in which statistics were produced and that the analysis of these numbers demands knowledge of the area in which the problem is located. The author points out that "[...] the treatment of these data by means of indicators, inference tests, etc. offers clues about the issues addressed, not truths; it brings out similarities, proximities or plausibilities, not certainties" (p.14).

Still under this aspect, it is noteworthy the trajectory of incorporation, by supporters in Brazil, of actions of the North American movement for the regulation of homeschooling, disregarding the historical cultural, social and economic differences between countries (BARBOSA; EVANGELISTA, 2017). We realize that the constant mention of international experiences and research to defend and justify the regulation of the practice of homeschooling in Brazil also ends up falling into this misunderstanding.

Thus, dialog about educational conceptions and theories with educational researchers, as well as listening to the demands of families who opt for education home

⁸ Available at: <https://www.aned.org.br/index.php/conheca-educacao-domiciliar/perguntas-e-respostas>. Accessed on: 09 Aug. 2022.





care shows itself to be a necessary dialogue to deepen the debate. However, there are few spaces for these exchanges to take place, and they are not always dialogues in which both parties are willing to listen. The international events on the topic of *homeschooling include*, almost exclusively, presentations of papers and speeches in defense of the movement, as is the case of the Global Home Education Exchange⁹.

Regarding the relationship between the university and the *homeschooling* movement, we highlight the pioneering partnership made, under the coordination of Prof. Dr. Cristiane Feitosa Pinheiro, between the Brazilian Bar Association (OAB-PI - the OAB-Subseção de Picos), ANED, the Angelicum Institute, the Institute of Independent Studies (INTESI) and the Federal University of Piauí, in the creation of the extension project entitled "COVID-19: Homeschooling in the context of the pandemic". The stated intention of this partnership was to offer courses, discussions, and lectures focused on home education from July to December 2020. All activities were transmitted remotely and provided certificates for registered participants.

At first, a proposal for a formative dialogue between a public university and supporters of the modality, open to the community, seemed interesting. However, in the publication announcing the support of the OAB of Piauí to the project, the organizers point out that the participation was motivated by the "need to qualify Piauí's lawyers on the subject to offer eventual legal support to homeschooling families".¹⁰

By following the activities carried out in the mentioned extension project, it was noticeable the use of a public institution, funded with public resources, to disseminate private agendas and business and marketing interests. Some of the proposed themes reveal this character of the project, such as: "The production of didactic material for *homeschooling*"; "How to become an entrepreneur in *homeschooling*?"; and "The curriculum in home education and the method *Classical Conversations*". Araujo and Leite (2020) cite the *site* of the *Classical Conversations* as one of the products of *Classical*

⁹ Available at: <https://ghex.world/>. Accessed on: 08.Aug.2022.

¹⁰ Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CC39pRbpcYi/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>. Accessed on: 09.Aug.2022.





Christian Community, company that "advocates for a classical, Christian, and communal education from clearly religious inscriptions" (p.12). According to the authors, access to the method is made by purchasing books and materials sold on its platform.

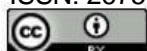
In view of this information, it is questionable whether the space of a public university would be the most appropriate for this type of education and it is emphasized, based on this experience, the defense of dialogue between academia and the homeschooling movement, however, given the need to analyze under what conditions it takes place and what interests motivate it.

Finally, given the strong resistance of educators and researchers in the field of education, we emphasize the urgent need to expand research with different approaches on the homeschooling movement, because the discussion around the theme is full of details and goes far beyond the attack against the alleged lack of socialization and training for citizenship, demanding the deepening of legal and historical aspects; economic and ideological; marketing; theoretical-pedagogical; motivation of choices, among others (RIBEIRO, 2020).

It is evaluated that academic research on home education and the projects of de-schooling can contribute, in Brazil, to broaden the debate on: the role of the State and the family in the education of children; the limits of freedom of educational choice and to which parts of the population the "right to choose" is intended; the principles of neoliberalism as a source for the refusal of State action regarding the compulsory school enrollment and the consequent privatization of education; among others.

5 Final considerations

It is understood that the present moment, of constant attacks on democracy by representatives of the federal government, requires firm and explicit positions in favor of public institutions, including the public school, the result of the historical struggle of Brazilian society. However, it is evaluated that, in the face of the movement for the regulation of home education, the defense of the school needs to be qualified, through





from arguments resultantes do diálogo entre pessoas com diferentes perspectivas e de pesquisa acadêmica sobre a temática.

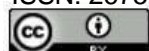
Focusing the gaze only on certain aspects and generalizing a movement that historically has presented countless facets and motivations, ends up opening space for the devaluation of any discourse of opposition to *homeschooling*, even when derived from speeches coming from "the academy."

As pointed out, it is not possible to blame entirely the tendency to trivialize the issue due to the difficulty of dialogue, since it is recurrent in the repertoire of proponents of homeschooling the attack against public schools and universities. However, fostering a scenario of polarization, in which the different groups do not talk and discourse "only for their own", does not contribute to the expansion of a debate that directly affects the right to education of children and adolescents in the country.

Beyond the critical period of economic and political crisis that the country is currently experiencing, in which the process of regulating homeschooling is associated with conservative and anti-democratic projects of then-president Bolsonaro, we risk asserting and defending the need for further analysis on the movement *homeschooling*, nationally and internationally, for the improvement of public schools. Knowing and analyzing the motivations of families when withdrawing their children from schools, as well as the criticisms made against them, can help in the decision-making process regarding the urgency of metamorphosing school institutions and transforming them into public spaces for education¹¹.

That said, it is notable the need to expand the social and academic debate related to the regulation of home education in the country, as well as the importance of scientific dissemination on the subject as a way to collaborate with the construction of a cohesive debate. Formulate a strong and coherent argumentative basis in defense of

¹¹Mention made to the lecture given by Prof. Antônio Nóvoa at FE/Unicamp, entitled "From public school to the public space of education", on 14.Nov.2017. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwOOzTdHNk>. Accessed on: 08.Aug.2022





homeschooling public, secular, and quality for all is one of the urgent and necessary paths to take in times of crisis such as the ones we are living through.

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