



Journal for Social
Science Archives

Journal for Social Science Archives

Online ISSN: 3006-3310

Print ISSN: 3006-3302

Volume 3, Number 2, 2025, Pages 508 – 518

Journal Home Page

<https://jssarchives.com/index.php/Journal/about>



Homeschooling and the Media Gap: A Parental Review of Mainstream Coverage in Pakistan

Muhammad Sarmad Atiq¹, Dr. Zameer Ahmed², Nida Noor³, Sundas Jabeen Mirza⁴ & Aysal Elham⁵

¹MS Media Sciences, Riphah Institute of Media Sciences, Riphah International University, Islamabad,
Email: msatiq@gmail.com

²PhD Media and Communication Studies, Riphah Institute of Media Sciences, Riphah International University,
Islamabad, Email: zamiratk2@gmail.com

³MS Media Sciences, Riphah Institute of Media Sciences, Riphah International University, Islamabad,
Email: nida.noor1996@gmail.com

⁴MS Media Sciences, Riphah Institute of Media Sciences, Riphah International University, Islamabad,
Email: sundasmirza600@gmail.com

⁵MS Media Sciences, Riphah Institute of Media Sciences, Riphah International University, Islamabad,
Email: aysalelham@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: April 01, 2025 Revised: May 04, 2025 Accepted: May 12, 2025 Available Online: May 17, 2025	This research examines the case of homeschooling representation in the media from Pakistan, comparing it with the public perception and socio-cultural acceptance homeschooling receives. The media exposes homeschooling in Pakistan with more emphasis on the narratives and less focus on the truth behind them. The research investigates the perceptions of parents to highlight the extent to which they feel the media represents their lived issues. The media representation is outdone with the aid of self-administered questionnaires and interviews with the parents, and hence media offers a window to the diverse realities beyond the homeschooling family narrative. Participants disclosed important information such as the lack of social representation, which only caters to homeschooling as a result of poverty, class, and reign, fuels elitism in homeschooling. There is a need for better media planning that will address the appropriate representation of homeschooling, powering social liberation that seeks policy change, reinstating homeschooling as a viable education alternative in Pakistan.
Keywords: Homeschooling in Pakistan, Media Representation of Homeschooling, Parental Perceptions, Educational Alternatives, Media Influence on Education, Homeschooling Challenges.	
Corresponding Author: Muhammad Sarmad Atiq Email: msatiq@gmail.com	



Introduction

Education is an important tool for socio-economic progress, thus making it an essential human right (Zendeli, 2017). Education in Pakistan faces various challenges like the urban-rural divide, deteriorated quality of teaching, infrastructural issues, and gender inequalities (Aslam, 2009a). According to a survey, Pakistan has the world's second-largest out-of-school population, with approximately 22.8 million children aged between 5-16 who are not going to school (Raza & Haq, 2019). Many parents are forced to opt for alternative schooling methods as the formal schooling system is unable to offer diverse learning requirements (Andrabi et al., 2010).

Homeschooling is a viable substitute for parents who are discontented with the formal schooling system (Fatima et al., 2023a). Homeschooling allows for an adapted approach, enabling parents to set syllabi which is best suited according to their children's intellect and emotions (Jeynes, 2016). The very nature of homeschooling allows the incorporation of fundamental socio-religious and ethical values, as is the case for many Pakistani families (Liao, 2024). Creativity, critical thinking, and pace-adjusted tailored learning are globally familiar to stem from homeschooling (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013a), a concept that is slowly being embraced in Pakistan.

Media coverage tends to concentrate on more relevant issues in education, like curriculum development and privatization of schools, whereas very little attention is given to homeschooling, as it treats the subject as a luxury fit for expatriate families. The lack of attention in the media breeds misconceptions about homeschooling, suggesting educational neglect and social isolation. Moreover, one-sided narratives around homeschooling overlook the reality of middle-class or rural families who resort to homeschooling out of necessity.

The global distribution of education was fully disrupted by COVID-19, even bringing homeschooling into the national discourse in Pakistan (Memon et al., 2021). With long school closures, many Pakistani parents took up educational roles, albeit informally participating in homeschooling practices (Khalid & Singal, 2023). They understood the shortcomings of traditional schooling systems and brought to light the gaps in these systems, while also showcasing the potential of homeschooling as a sustainable model (Salatin et al., 2022). Still, most Pakistani media outlets were fixated on portraying pandemic homeschooling as a makeshift approach treating it as a problem to be solved, rather than as an exploration of a long-term alternative.

The reasons for homeschooling in Pakistan differ greatly with the socio-economic background of the respondents (Fatima et al., 2023b). Educated and urbanite families often homeschool because of school quality issues, moral and religious instruction concerns, and the need for adapted attention (Thomas, 2019a). On the other hand, rural families resort to homeschooling because of remote school locations, accessibility issues, and limited financial resources (B. D. Ray et al., 2021). However, from the media's perspective, this class-defined diversity is rarely, if ever, acknowledged—a blend of lower and middle-class biases dominates narratives surrounding homeschooling families.

Homeschooling in Pakistan is considered a legal grey area due to no official government policies identifying or regulating it. The lack of proper regulation gives rise to ambiguous policies, which result in a lack of clear boundaries for parents, making homeschooling families susceptible to being labelled as educationally neglectful. In the U.S. and the U.K., where homeschooling is acknowledged, the media helps shape public perception regarding policy (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013b). There is no campaigning for these policies being placed in the Pakistani media, which prevents facilitating homeschooling as a valid option within the education system.

On a global scale, the conversations in homeschooling circles seem to focus on the debates of academic achievement, socialization, and citizenship (B. Ray, 2017a). In Pakistan, on the other hand, media debates are limited to a lack of information and do not question the underlying pedagogical and social questions relating to homeschooling, resulting in limited public understanding about homeschooling, which stifles essential conversations regarding its merits, demerits, and implications.

The way homeschooling is mediated impacts public perception of it as an educational alternative significantly. In Pakistan, traditional school education continues to be viewed as the default norm and alternative approaches are ignored due to a lack of mainstream coverage. Consequently, most homeschooling parents are trapped in sociological invisibility, legal obscurity, and institutional neglect without public discussion frameworks.

Media practitioners need to pay more careful and inclusive attention to this developing phenomenon of education, given the increasing homeschooling community in Pakistan (Fatima et al., 2023c). Detailed and precise coverage could mediate the contact between the homeschooling parents and the homeschooling social integration, fostering acceptance, constructive understanding, and forward-thinking policies. Embracing different academic pathways within the country's attempts at resolving its multidimensional educational problems, including homeschooling, has the potential to act as a stimulus for more fundamental reforms across the education system.

Problem Statement

Although homeschooling is rapidly emerging as an educational option for parents within Pakistan, it is still not commonly featured in the media. The media gives little attention to the greater context of homeschooling and instead presents shallow or misrepresented undertones. The absence of representation in the media has the potential to form unfounded stereotypes and a limited comprehension of homeschooling within the general population. Homeschooling parents often feel that their lived experiences, challenges, and motivations are unheard and sidelined in the media's portrayals. There seems to be insufficient attention given to the representation of homeschooling in media, which drives its recognition as an educational model, posing sociocultural acceptance challenges in Pakistan.

This study seeks to fill the gap concerning the representation of homeschooling in media by addressing it from the angle of parents who practice homeschooling. An analysis of the media coverage on homeschooling and the interviews with parents aims to reveal whether media representations correspond to parents' lived experiences and expectations as they relate to homeschooling. As the phenomenon of homeschooling is on the rise in Pakistan, it is equally important to study how media portrayals influence the perceptions of parents and how these perceptions impact the social understanding of homeschooling in the country.

Research Objective

This research aims to investigate parental perceptions regarding the coverage of homeschooling in mainstream media in Pakistan and to evaluate the impact of such media portrayals on their perception and acceptance of homeschooling.

Research Questions

- What is the perception of parents who homeschool their children concerning the portrayal of homeschooling in mainstream media in Pakistan?

- How accurately do media representations of homeschooling in Pakistan correspond to the experiences and difficulties encountered by homeschooling families?

Literature Review

Homeschooling as an alternative to classroom education is a popular talking point across different regions of the world, including Pakistan. Still, despite resulting in more attention, it remains devoid of discourse in media outlets in Pakistan, especially considering that the country is largely controlled by a conventional school system. Media plays a critical role in either consolidating perceptions or norms about alternative education like homeschooling; it can either refute the existing perception or challenge a norm that has been accepted in society. In Pakistan, the existing teaching frameworks blended with the homeschooling parents' narratives pose a challenge, where the media fails to portray homeschooling as an educational renaissance (Fatima et al., 2023d).

Homeschooling in Pakistan – A Growing Educational Alternative

The academic customs of Pakistan do not allow for homeschooling as an option, cutting across the local expatriate communities as well as upper-middle-class city-dwellers. The country's traditional approach to updating learning resources continues to lead the charge. The basic model of schooling in Pakistan and the deep-rooted custom of 'one-size-fits-all' education leave a majority of students unwillingly subjected to rote learning (Aslam, 2009b). Over recent years, however, homeschool education has slowly started to gain traction among parents in Pakistan looking for a tailored approach to classroom instruction (Fatima et al., 2023e).

Parents who choose to homeschool their children demonstrate a clear misunderstanding of the educational system and have grievances towards the set curriculum. Homeschooling affords parents the freedom to tailor lesson plans to fit their children's requirements, hobbies, and tempo. This becomes crucial in a setting where educational standards in conventional schools tend to differ in quality, particularly in rural regions or urban areas struggling with funding. Also, other researchers have mentioned that a lack of control over the child's moral and religious nurturing was a primary reason parents chose to homeschool (Thomas, 2019b).

In Pakistan, homeschooling is still an emerging phenomenon, but some research implies that its adoption is on the rise, especially in urban centres such as Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad. A survey carried out by Fatima et al. (2023f) states that a large proportion of homeschooling parents seek to protect their children from the social problems associated with school environments, including bullying and peer pressure. These families perceive homeschooling as a means of educational customization alongside protection from social and environmental issues.

Media Representation of Homeschooling in Pakistan

The concern regarding the impact of homeschooling on the family unit is a specific gap within the literature as Pakistan's mass media do not address the issue exhaustively. It has been documented that the media does not seem to regard homeschooling as a plausible model of education. Furthermore, the media in Pakistan seems to have a very narrow and simplistic perception of homeschooling. To illustrate, some media coverage on homeschooling tends to concentrate on the more extreme cases, such as families homeschooling out of necessity in remote rural regions, or during trying periods like the COVID-19 pandemic (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2021). These images are often divorced from the reality of urban centres, which form one part of the homeschooling community. In these regions, homeschooling is not only a response to geographic isolation but also a consequence of profound dissatisfaction with available school education (Fatima et al., 2023g).

Furthermore, homeschooling, or gating learning at home, is also perceived as a wealthy phenomenon in popular culture. Many reporters illustrate homeschooling as the domain of elite or highly educated families with the time and money to homeschool (Maranto, 2021). Such media portrayals strengthen the belief that homeschooling is an elite's elective educational model, in contrast to a more widely available and accessible form of learning. In reality, a significant number of middle-class parents in the urban areas are resorting to homeschooling due to the limitations posed by the traditional schooling system, like large student-to-teacher ratios, inadequate resources, and minimal individual attention (Davis, 2011).

In the context of Pakistan, these media representations do not consider the breadth of the family that homeschoools. These families are hardly depicted outside of sensationalized crises, so the average public isn't educated enough about the reasons these parents choose to homeschool and the advantages it can yield, especially regarding academic achievement and personal development (Fatima et al., 2023h).

The Role of Media in Shaping Parental Perceptions

The portrayal of homeschooling in the media can either positively or negatively affect parental perceptions. In Pakistan, where traditional schooling is widely accepted, homeschooling is often projected as a peculiar, and at times even extreme, approach. This leads to misconceptions and biases which, although founded on media perception, unjustly limit many parents from considering homeschooling as a legitimate educational alternative. It is also possible that parents seeking supporting information for homeschooling will find favourable media coverage, while those on the fence may be influenced and put off by superficial or negative depictions.

Fatima et al. (2023i) highlight that the media has the potential to either construct or deconstruct parental engagement with homeschooling. Parents in Pakistan often believe homeschooling is an elite choice or one available only to special needs families, thus ignoring the manifold reasons behind a parent's decision to homeschool. The media oversimplifies the difficulties regarding homeschooling, such as the parents' time restraints, resources, and the risk of social isolation. Such oversights contribute to a flawless stereotype where homeschooling is perceived as simplistic, easy, and devoid of challenges, which can set unachievable standards for novice homeschooling families.

The Need for Balanced Media Representation

There is an increasing call for media legal regulation and coverage of homeschooling in Pakistan. Media institutions can actively advocate for educational policy reforms that include the recognition and governance of homeschooling. In this case, they are relevant because the media provides information and ought to portray homeschooling in a more holistic manner, depicting the benefits alongside the complexities that families experience (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013c). This portrayal could aid in encouraging homeschooling to be accepted as a credible educational option for all Pakistani families, irrespective of their socio-economic standing or educational qualifications.

Moreover, representation in the media plays a major role in shaping public policies. In regions where homeschooling is embraced on a wide scale, the media is almost always the driving force behind laws that seek to aid homeschooling parents or families. In the case of Pakistan, the absence of media concern over the issue has led to the lack of policies that recognize homeschooling as a legitimate form of education. If media channels enhanced their coverage of the issue, they could help generate adequate attention toward the legal and social discourse about homeschooling, which could prompt reforms on policies concerning homeschooling.

The studies directed toward homeschooling in Pakistan indicate a noticeable gap in media attention, which relates to how homeschooling is viewed by parents and its acceptability as an alternative form of education. Such media portrayals tend to be one-dimensional, capturing the extremes or outlier families, and ignore the many reasons and difficulties faced by the rest of the homeschooling families in Pakistan. The various parents' views highlight a misunderstanding of the portrayal by the media, which ignores and enhances social misconceptions regarding homeschooling. A more accurate approach toward media portrayal would reinforce public understanding, regulate the concept of homeschooling, and invite policy changes needed by homeschooling families to make homeschooling accessible.

Methodology

For this study, a qualitative research design is employed to understand the views of parents relating to how homeschooling is depicted in the media in Pakistan. It is proximity suited in this case because it seeks to gather the experiences, attitudes, and views of a person, which is crucial in examining perceptions and stories from parents who homeschool their children (Creswell & Poth, 2016a). Because of the study's goal of exploring the in-depth understanding of homeschooling parents, this strategy is likely to provide rich, detailed data describing how media influences these parents and their perceptions, understanding, as well as the decision-making processes used in the course of media representations.

Participants

The focus of the research is on ten parents engaged in homeschooling their children. The sample size is chosen to allow a balance between breadth and depth for collecting data. The participants will be identified using targeted sampling, guaranteeing that only parents who are currently homeschooling their children are selected. This purposeful selection technique is effective for accumulating rich data from knowledgeable individuals who are central to the issue at hand (Palinkas et al., 2015). The requirements for inclusion are: (1) parents who have been homeschooling their children for at least six months; (2) parents with some access to media coverage of homeschooling, including print, television, or online; and (3) willingness to actively take part in interviews and complete questionnaires. This assures that the sample represents different underlying reasons and problems from homeschooling families throughout Pakistan.

Data Collection

An innovative approach that blends both qualitative and quantitative data capture through a semi-structured questionnaire will be employed. The questionnaire will have two major sections: the first concentrating on demographic data and homeschooling activities, while the second will focus on perceptions of media coverage concerning homeschooling. There will be both closed-ended and open-ended questions, including Likert scale questions, enabling participants to offer more elaborate responses regarding their perceptions of media coverage (Bryman, 2016).

The flexible semi-structured format of the questionnaire provides an opportunity to follow up on leads which may arise during the data collection phase. Parents will be invited to share how they perceive the media's portrayal of homeschooling and if, in their opinion, media coverage depicts their experience comparably. Additionally, they will be questioned on how the media portrayal has impacted their educational decisions. Questions such as "How do you think homeschooling is generally portrayed in the media?" and "In your opinion, how accurate is the media representation of homeschooling compared to your experience?" will capture the necessary qualitative perspectives sought to answer the research questions.

To prepare for data enrichment, detailed interviews will be held with a selected sample of ten individuals. These interviews will provide additional context regarding the participants' lived realities and allow them to elaborate upon their responses in the questionnaires. Depending on the participant's preferences or convenience, the interviews will be conducted either in person or online.

Data Analysis

The data acquired from the questionnaires and interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis, which is cited frequently as a method of qualitative data analysis. It enables a researcher to identify and interpret patterns or themes within the data of a given inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is fit for this study because it allows for the systematic identification of recurring themes about the representation of homeschooling in the media and how parents perceive those representations. The process will include several steps: familiarization with the data, coding of significant themes, and grouping those codes into wider themes that answer the research questions.

Data will be transcribed word-for-word, and coding will be done using an inductive approach where themes will develop on their own within the data (Saldaña, 2021). This ensures that the analysis will capture the findings as grounded in the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants without external biases. The analysis narrative will strive to address the discrepancy between how the media depicts homeschooling and the reality as experienced by the parents, and how this discrepancy shapes parental perceptions and decisions toward homeschooling.

Ethical Considerations

An ethical review will be conducted to review the ethics of this study. Participants will be informed about the study's intent as well as matters related to confidentiality and anonymity. Protection of informed consent will be obtained before the start of the study, which will describe the voluntary nature of the study and the freedom to withdraw at any time without repercussions (Creswell & Poth, 2016b). All collected data will be securely stored with restricted access, maintained within the standard ethical guidelines.

Limitations

As much as the qualitative approach will shed light on underlying details within the study, a possible drawback is that the sample of ten parents is relatively small and might not capture the complete essence of the homeschooling population in Pakistan. Furthermore, there is a possibility of bias due to the use of self-reported information from parents, as participants may have a personal assessment about the portrayal of media about homeschooling and their own experiences. Nevertheless, the thorough nature of the collection process will ensure that the participants' perspectives and experiences are captured, which makes up for the small sample size.

Findings and Discussion

Even though homeschooling has garnered more attention in recent years, it appears to still be a peripheral option in Pakistan's educational landscape. The choice to homeschool, the methods used, the media coverage surrounding homeschooling, and public attitudes towards homeschooling are all important factors that affect homeschooling families as well as the broader society. This research examined the factors that motivate families to homeschool, the challenges they encounter, and how the media influences public perception of homeschooling in Pakistan. The information gathered from the responses, which offered insights into the issues raised, is elaborated below.

Reasons for Homeschooling

The motivations behind homeschooling children stem from personal, cultural, and societal reasons. There is a particular strain of dissatisfaction with the traditional schooling system. These frustrations range from overcrowded classrooms to not enough individual attention to teaching more common subjects. This taps into a broader global critique of the one-size-fits-all model and traditional education systems. In Pakistan, families that opt for homeschooling often cite overcrowded classrooms as a roadblock to focused learning. Unlike homeschooling, traditional schooling does not allow parents and children to customize classes. This freedom is limited as the child is unable to engage fully with the education provided. This perspective précisés why parents opt to homeschool their children.

Along with academics, safety issues also governed the choice of homeschooling. Parents expressed fears of bullying and unsafe conditions in many conventional schools as motivating factors. This aligns with other studies where parents resort to homeschooling to safeguard their children from emotional and physical harm, especially in bullying or violence-ridden settings (B. Ray, 2017b). Other motives included religion or culture, with the parents wanting to mold specific moral and religious teachings into the lives of their children, which is especially important in the Pakistani context.

Practices and Approaches to Homeschooling

The collection of approaches from homeschooling families in Pakistan reflects the distinctiveness of this educational model. There were parents who had a defined set of rules and materials to follow, and those who preferred a more liberal learning pathway that was geared towards children's interests. This mix of rigid and loose models points out the strength of homeschooling, which combines formal education with informal, experience-based learning guided by children's interests.

The results show a large proportion of parents either followed set online programs or used a mix of rigid and loose structures. This marks the emergence of a new pattern in homeschooling around the world, especially the use of technology to ease the learning process beyond the classroom. Through the use of the internet, virtual classes, and homeschooling networks, parents can access quality materials and connect with other homeschooling families, enriching the learning experience and providing support for dealing with challenges.

Advantages of Homeschooling

The responses regarding the advantages of homeschooling were overwhelmingly affirmative. The most common advantage noted was individualized learning. Parents argued that homeschooling enabled them to address their children's individual needs through instructional designs achievable only in unconventional school settings. This theme aligns with research, which demonstrated that homeschooling offers flexibility in approaches to learning and often enhances learner outcomes (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013d).

Alongside the learning benefits, many parents were interested in the emotional and social advantages that arise from homeschooling. Some parents have noted that homeschooling enables a greater focus on social-emotional learning and well-being, as well as facilitating a greater focus on non-academic activities. This shows the multifaceted nature of homeschool education, which can accommodate not only instruction but also the cultivation of skills, hobbies, and the emotional resilience often sidelined by the academically driven thoroughness of traditional school systems.

Obstacles to Homeschooling

As with other forms of education, homeschooling comes with its own set of challenges to navigate, and in this case, some limitations to consider. Several parents voiced challenges around finding appropriate materials and resources. This was especially concerning in Pakistan, where the homeschool community is relatively small and resources are scarcer than in countries with well-established homeschooling infrastructures. Parents often had to use generic international online resources, which were sometimes culturally irrelevant or inappropriate for Pakistani children.

Another noteworthy challenge is managing homeschooling around other family duties. This is a problem that many homeschooling parents struggle with all around the globe because it requires a significant amount of time and effort. In Pakistan, where families are supplemented by extended relatives in terms of childcare, many parents deliberately divided the caregiving role with other family members to ease the burden.

Socialization emerged as another critical challenge, with some parents expressing worry over children's interactions with their peers beyond the family circle. Homeschooling families often incur the brunt of societal scapegoating for their children's lack of access to the "real school" where age-appropriate socialization takes the focus stage. In any case, a lot of parents fought back by providing the children with socialization through special classes, community activities, and group homeschooling sessions.

Media's Influence on Changing the Face of Public Perception

Public perception was identified as one of the predominant areas of concern, particularly due to the framing of homeschooling by the media. Most parents expressed concern about the media portrayal of homeschooling in Pakistan, claiming that it has been largely negative, branding it as a choice exclusively made by the upper class. This aligns with other cultures where media representations tend to focus on outlier families and exceptional circumstances, as opposed to the day-to-day lives of the majority of homeschooling families (Watson, 2019).

Representation of homeschooling, especially the notion that it is a luxury available only to affluent or rural families, was criticized by a significant number of parents. This stigma excludes the lower middle-class, which could gain from homeschooling, but are led to believe that they do not have the means to access it. The perception of homeschooling belonging to a particular family type, be it wealthy, elite, or religious, serves to uphold societal disparity and neglect the myriad of families who educationally chose this path.

Still, some parents noticed that the media's portrayal of homeschooling had a more promising impact, especially when it highlighted flexibility and personalization. Positive media portrayals often helped strengthen their confidence in homeschooling, which illustrates the influence media has in shaping public perceptions regarding alternative educational models. Negative portrayals, however, led to incredulity in some parents, reporting judgment or criticism from extended family and society due to these portrayals.

Recommendations for Media Outlets

In Pakistan, parents made several recommendations for the portrayal of homeschooling that may lead to a more accurate depiction. One of the most prominent suggestions highlighted the need for the media to depict both sides of homeschooling – its advantages alongside its difficulties. Parents underlined the representation of homeschooling families with differing socio-economic statuses as

well. This would help dispel the notion that homeschooling is the exclusive domain of wealthy or rural families and provide a more accurate depiction of its widespread appeal.

Another important piece of advice was for the media to concentrate on the practical concerns of homeschooling. While positive representations have their place, many parents perceived a notable gap in media coverage regarding the day-to-day homeschooling realities, which encompasses both the logistical as well as emotional challenges families confront. If the media were to focus on these issues, along with ways to effectively deal with them, it would help foster a deeper understanding of homeschooling, thus regulating it as an educational choice for more families in Pakistan.

Conclusion

Homeschooling in Pakistan stems from deep-rooted cultural and religious concerns as well as a general dissatisfaction with conventional schooling. Although homeschooling offers some degree of educational customization and promotes holistic development, it faces significant challenges such as limited resources, poor time management, inadequate social interactions, and insufficient networking opportunities. We cannot overlook the impact of media on the public perception of homeschooling as well. While media portrayal of homeschooling tends toward nefarious, elitist angles, there is room for constructive homeschooling media narratives that accurately depict the homeschooler's reality. Such narratives can assist in removing the stigma attached to homeschooling in Pakistan. If the media motivates and explains the challenges and represents the diverse families that embrace this educational philosophy, the media can foster a more positive narrative surrounding education in Pakistan.

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