

Article

Implementation of Home-Schooling: Parents' Practices and Processes

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Abstract: With increasing numbers of parents choosing to home-school their child, currently there is very limited information about how this is implemented. Utilizing the recently developed Parents' Perceptions of Home-Schooling scale (PPHS), a survey of 93 home-schooling parents in Western Australia was undertaken. Data were collected using five Likert scales to obtain information concerned with a range of implementation aspects. Key findings were related to the process for registering and providing an appropriate learning program, the role of the home-educator moderator, the type of study and support utilized, and whether the student had a disability or ALNs. The discussion considers links to inclusion and how the heightened uptake of home-schooling can be monitored effectively.

Keywords: home-schooling; parents; home-schooling implementation; practices; moderation; Australia

1. Introduction

Home-schooling is the practice of parents or carers educating children in a home setting, as opposed to a formal school environment [1,2]. It is the parents' control of the education that makes it home-schooling, rather than where the education takes place [3]. By nature, home-schooling is individualized and child focused, within which there are many alternative approaches to implementing home-schooling. In addition, there are many reasons why parents may choose to home-school their child [4]. These include adherence to a specific ideology (often at odds with traditional educational practices) which works to instill personal beliefs [5]. These ideologies often relate to religious or moral beliefs. There are also many parents who chose to home-school their child as they do not feel that the traditional classroom provides stimulating, motivating, or appropriate content for them [3]. Different motivations for home-schooling can be reactive (due to reacting to a situation or circumstance) or proactive (making a deliberate choice to home-school due to strongly held beliefs) [4,5]. In Western Australia, parents who had always home-schooled their child cited proactive philosophical beliefs and the needs of the child as mostly being employed in their decision-making [4]. Reactive reasons were most frequently cited when deciding to withdraw a child from school to home-school, in concern for their child's needs not being met.

Home-schooling is becoming more sought after in many countries, such as the UK, USA, and Australia, with increasing numbers of parents choosing to home-school, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic [6,7]. Nevertheless, home-schooling is illegal or is restricted in some countries, such as Germany, Sweden, China, and Brazil [7]. The reasons for these restrictions include maintaining the social structure of the society and ensuring children's rights are met [7,8]. Even though home-schooling is legislated for in some countries, it is still fraught with controversy and legal uncertainty in many cases [7]. This uncertainty applies not just to the use of home-schooling as an education alternative, but also to how it is enacted in the home. As government decisions vary between countries, in Australia, where education is mainly state-based, there are also significant differences



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between jurisdictions. To ensure an opportunity to review and compare practices within a specific cohort of parents, the current research adopts the use of the Parents' Perceptions of Home-Schooling scale (PPHS) [1], to identify implementation practices and issues of home-schooling in one state of Western Australia.

2. Implementation Practices

While there is a great deal of research on why parents choose home-schooling, including parents of students with disabilities, there is less information available on how the process of home-schooling is implemented or practiced. The way in which curriculum is organized and implemented by parents is highly variable and can be dependent on the individuals' beliefs and views around home-schooling and educational practices [9]. For example, one mother's routine with her children is to have breakfast and do chores, go for a bike ride, and complete book work before lunchtime [10]. The afternoon is then spent on enriching activities such as cooking, reading, climbing trees, playing music, and researching topics of interest. She also meets with other home-schooling families for subjects such as science, art, and dance, which are best learnt in a group. By nature, home-schooling is individualized although within it there are many alternative approaches.

Parents who home-school are well placed to use innovative teaching and learning methods, such as situated practice, community of practice, and transformed practice [9]. As parents are not restricted by a specific curriculum (generally), they may have greater flexibility in organizing a curriculum that is not evident in a standard classroom. In [9]'s study, home-school parents responded to a survey which asked questions about how they structured the day and the reasons for this choice. Most respondents indicated that they structured the learning around the child/ren's learning style. Only a few respondents suggested that they structured the day around suggestions from a curriculum package. This finding may not be surprising, given that the parents chose not to enroll their child/ren in a formal school setting.

Other factors for structuring the learning included the child's interests, resources available, the parent's experience, faith (God comes first), family reasons (i.e., job commitments), and their child's special needs (i.e., behavior or therapy). International trends have specifically seen an increase in the number of families choosing to home-school their child if they have a disability or special learning needs [6]. One edited book contains numerous descriptions written by home-schooling (or unschooling, or wild-schooling, or road-schooling) families [11]. The authors describe a variety of ways in which the children are provided with learning opportunities and experiences, ranging from completely unstructured days where the learning is taken as it comes, to assigning parts of the day to different types of learning. For those who are new to home-schooling, how the day is organized and what types of learning takes place are frequently asked questions.

3. Home-Schooling in Australia

In Australia, home-schooling is a legal option, and the pandemic has led to an increase in parents opting to home-school (or home educate), particularly for students with special educational needs [4,12]. It has been posited that during the pandemic, parents were provided with an unwitting trial of home-schooling, and paired with potentially negative views of traditional schooling, increasing numbers of parents chose to continue the practice even after schools re-opened [12]. Most students in Australia attend a government or private school (often religious in nature). Both types of school are supported through government funding to different extents [12]. Some home-schooled students, however, may be provided with some government funding; nonetheless, the major cost of educating the child is left to the parents. A minimal amount of funding may be provided through the federal government Assistance for Isolated Childrens scheme. This may also be used for children with special educational needs in certain circumstances to enable them to be home-schooled. Each state and territory have an Education Act which specifies the processes and procedures for applying to home-school and each varies slightly. One commonality among

the legislation is the right of the parents to apply, and the requirement to register with the local school authority. The parents of children in the compulsory education period (5 years 6 months to 17 years 6 months in Western Australia) must register as a home educator if they wish to home-school their child [13].

4. Moderating Home-Schooling in Western Australia

In countries where home-schooling is legal, there are a range of different moderating procedures in place which are generally referred to in the national legislation [6]. In Western Australia, where the research was conducted, the educational programs used by parents are evaluated by home education moderators who are appointed by the CEO of the Department of Education [13]. The home education moderator is a skilled and experienced individual who is expected to visit the home within three months of initial registration and then at least on a yearly basis, reporting back to the Department of Education on the child's progress. If there are concerns about the progress of the child, these are communicated to the parents, and they are given time to address any issues. If these concerns are not addressed, the registration to home-school may be revoked.

5. Method

The Parent Perceptions of Home-Schooling scale (PPHS) [1] sought to clarify both motivations as well as implementation and practical issues associated with parental choice regarding home-schooling. The content and construct validity of the scale was undertaken via two iterations involving a consultative representative sample of home-schooling parents, followed by a pilot study undertaken with 21 home-schooling parents (see [1], for further details of scale development). The PPHS was subsequently used with 99 home-schooling parents in Western Australia with initial analysis focusing on the first part of the scale related to motivations for home-schooling [4]. This paper reports data from the second part of the scale that focused on issues surrounding implementation practices for home-schooling. This contained five Likert-type scales related to different aspects of implementation. Items were identified from the literature and through discussions with parents attending a home-schooling group. The scales contained items related to daily practice (4 items), use of support (12 items), satisfying government requirements (11 items), receiving support from the Government home education moderator (9 items), and personal feelings about home-schooling (8 items).

The sample consisted of parents who were home-schooling their children. Access to these parents was targeted through invitations emailed to Western Australian home-schooling groups and through local home-schooling social media sites. The questionnaire was posted on a Qualtrics site and accessible for two months. Ethics clearance was received from a local university and parents were required to confirm their participation to access the Qualtrics survey by ticking a box confirming consent and that they had been appropriately informed about the study. If consent was not received, parents were directed out of the survey. To ensure anonymity, IP addresses were removed from the recorded data. A total of 93 parents participated by completing the questionnaire, although not all parents responded to all questions. Parents were asked to complete the questionnaire regarding one child that they were home-schooling. The child was to be selected in the following order: the child having a disability, additional learning needs (ALNs), or being the eldest home-schooled.

Initially, consideration was given to all individual items in the scales. Subsequently, the items in each scale were summed to provide a set of total scale mean responses. By applying one-way between subjects' ANOVAs using SPSS, these were used to analyze responses for seven independent variables of geolocation (urban, rural), gender (male, female), school type (Catholic, government, independent), identified child (disability, ALNs, eldest), age of child when deciding to home-school (3–11, 12–14 years), attendance when commencing home-schooling (mainstream, at home), and current age of child (3–11, 12–17 years).

6. Results

Most parents commenced home-schooling when their child was between the ages of 4 and 9 years ($n = 69$), with none indicating that they started home-schooling after the age of 14 years. The number of children that the survey was completed about was similar for primary school K-Year 6 ($n = 43$), and for secondary Years 7–12 ($n = 47$). The cohort of children contained 39 girls and 51 boys. Of these, 29 were identified as having a disability, 17 with ALNs, and 45 were chosen as the eldest child being home-schooled. Sixty children were identified as having been attending a government ($n = 38$), independent ($n = 16$), or Catholic ($n = 6$) school, when a decision was made to home-school them.

7. Time Spent on Educational Approaches by the Child

An initial question asked parents to indicate the amount of time their child spent on average each week on a range of educational approaches. Times were allocated into four categories. For those who indicated none, they were coded as ‘not at all’. Those who responded with less than 15 h per week or who stipulated very little were categorized as ‘very little’. Those who responded with either somewhat, or a number of hours between eight and fifteen, were categorized as ‘somewhat’. The final category of ‘quite a lot’ included those who recorded more than 20 h per week. From Table 1, it can be seen that the most amount of time was spent on both structured formal and unstructured informal work, with almost all families including outside play or activities within their weekly programs. Very few families undertook excursions or participated in home-schooling groups. Even though most children used a computer or accessed online curriculum, these options were not overly used.

Table 1. Time spent per week on average by the child being home-schooled.

Aspects of Home-Schooling	Somewhat (8–15 hrs. p/wk.)	Quite a Lot (>20 hrs. p/wk.)	Very Little	Not at All	Total N of Responses
Structured formal work	43	31	4	3	81
Unstructured informal work	37	31	1	2	71
Outside play/activity	29	27	6	5	67
Excursions	16	7	19	11	53
Groups including HS groups	16	11	16	9	52
Peer interaction/play dates	19	18	11	4	52
Working on/using a computer	23	17	12	9	61
Using online curriculum/resources	18	21	17	8	64
Community—dance, music, sport, etc.	16	19	17	3	55

Note. Due to missing data, numbers do not equal 93.

In addition, parents were able to include other activities in which their child was engaged. Responses included specialist lessons such as violin, private lessons, therapy, volunteering, site visits of different industries, part-time employment, play, and involvement in their own business. Two individual items related to how structured their home-schooling day was ($n = 84$, $M = 1.90$, $SD = 0.786$) and to what extent they followed the government curriculum ($n = 85$, $M = 2.14$, $SD = 0.978$). Most parents indicated that their day contained very little structure, and that they somewhat followed the government curriculum.

8. Different Aspects of Home-Schooling

Parents were subsequently asked to indicate their responses to five scales covering different aspects of home-schooling. Each scale involved a range of items related to the

topic. After identifying the number of responses that recorded ‘not applicable to me’, these responses were recoded as missing data. This gave a final mean score for parents who indicated these were relevant to them, from 1 (very little) to 4 (a lot). Individual item mean scores were calculated for all items in each scale. These are presented in the following tables.

9. Time Spent by the Parent Preparing for Home-Schooling

In addition to asking parents how much time their child spent on different aspects of home-schooling (see Table 1), they were also asked the amount of time they spent on preparing for and implementing home-schooling for their child. Preparing for home-schooling, researching for curriculum resources, and gathering resources were all considered to be somewhat time consuming (Table 2). The activity taking the most time was working directly with their child where they spent quite a lot of time.

Table 2. Daily practice each week for home-schooling.

Item	Not Applicable	N of Responses	Mean	SD
How much time do you spend preparing for home-schooling?	2	84	2.15	0.825
How much time do you spend directly working with this child?	1	85	2.71	0.897
Researching for curriculum resources	6	80	2.53	1.04
Gathering resources	5	80	2.46	1.07
Other	25	30		

Note. Range is 1 = very little; 2 = somewhat; 3 = quite a lot; 4 = a lot.

Additional aspects of home-schooling included supporting the child with self-directed learning and spontaneous involvement in learning as opportunities arose.

10. Frequency of Use of Sources of Support

Most parents indicated little or only somewhat use of a range of potential supports for home-schooling. The most frequently used support was general online resources and libraries, although parents tended to also access specialist support when needed (Table 3). The least utilized were personal contacts such as the extended family and friends. There was also limited use of home-school or community groups. Online classes and home education websites were somewhat used.

Table 3. Frequency of use of support for home-schooling.

Item	Not Applicable	N of Responses	Mean	SD
Extended family	23	9	1.11	0.333
Friends	23	61	1.57	0.741
National or state based home-school support organizations	28	57	1.28	0.590
Local home-school groups	12	73	1.92	0.924
Specific needs home-school groups (e.g., ASD)	51	33	1.42	0.663
Libraries	1	84	2.27	0.949
Community groups	17	66	1.89	0.862
General online resources	4	81	2.56	0.922
Home Education websites	7	77	1.94	0.937
Museums	4	81	2.00	0.880
Additional support by specialists, e.g., OT, Physio, Speech, Psychology, etc.	38	47	2.28	1.12
Online classes	15	70	2.03	0.884
Others—please list	21	5		

Note. Range is 1 = very little; 2 = somewhat; 3 = quite a lot; 4 = a lot.

Other individual responses included home-school art and ballet classes, drama, dance, guides, distance education programs, use of mentors, and science experiments online.

11. Satisfying the Government Requirements for Home-Schooling

Overall, satisfying the government requirements for home-schooling in WA was considered to be mostly quite easy. Specifically, the process for registering to home-school a child and providing an acceptable learning environment were deemed to be very easy. From Table 4, it is evident that while the most challenging aspects were preparing for moderation meetings and developing the curriculum, these were still judged to be somewhat easy.

Table 4. Ease of satisfying government requirements for home-schooling.

Item	Not Applicable	N of Responses	Mean	SD
Accessing information about home-schooling	0	85	2.89	0.913
Understanding the government requirements for home-schooling	1	83	2.71	0.891
Meeting the administrative requirements for home-schooling	4	81	2.91	0.964
Process for registering to home-school your child	5	79	3.43	0.796
Preparing for moderation meetings	7	78	2.42	0.919
Providing an acceptable learning environment	0	85	3.18	0.862
Understanding your child's current level of working	1	84	2.93	1.00
Measuring progress	2	83	2.73	1.07
Reporting on progress	6	79	2.67	1.03
Presentation of evidence	4	81	2.74	1.03
Developing your curriculum	8	77	2.49	1.02
Others—please list	20	4		

Note. Range is 1 = not easy; 2 = somewhat easy; 3 = quite easy; 4 = very easy.

Other mentions included using online course providers, dealing with difficult curriculum websites, and assessing high school lessons. Coming from an educational background meant some parents were able to easily cope with this aspect. As written by one parent, "Understanding how your particular moderator prefers reports is tricky and preparing for these meetings takes so much time away from the children".

12. Satisfaction with Support from the Government-Nominated Home Education Moderator

Although parents indicated less than positive satisfaction about the role of their moderator, they were somewhat to quite satisfied with how they performed this role. Frequency of moderation meetings, contact by their home education moderator, and the encouragement they received from them were all positive (Table 5).

Table 5. Satisfaction with government home education moderator.

Item	Not Applicable	N of Responses	Mean	SD
The role of your home education moderator	7	46	1.57	0.501
General support of your home education moderator	11	73	2.79	1.11
Frequency of contact by your home education moderator	10	74	2.96	0.944
Frequency of moderator meetings	10	72	3.19	0.944
Support with developing a curriculum	26	57	2.21	0.977
The encouragement they give me	11	73	2.95	1.11
Practical help and guidance with implementing the curriculum	28	56	2.46	1.08
Availability of support throughout the year	28	56	2.48	1.16
Information provided on your state/territory School Education Act	22	62	2.40	1.06
Others—please list	17	3		

Note. Range is 1 = not satisfied; 2 = somewhat satisfied; 3 = quite satisfied; 4 = very satisfied.

Additional individual comments included the importance of continuity of the home education moderator to provide a strong relationship with the family. Even though a parent suggested that their home education moderator was a nice person and wrote a nice report about the parent meeting their child's needs, the home education moderator was unable to

help with any of the questions they had regarding future directions or potential schools and did not refer them to anyone else for help.

13. Positive Aspects of Home-Schooling for Parents and Families

Table 6 highlights how positive overall parents felt about home-schooling their child. The least rated, while still a positive feeling, was the impression they received from their wider family about home-schooling.

Table 6. Feelings about home-schooling.

Item How Positive...	Not Applicable	N of Responses	Mean	SD
do you feel about your home-schooling experience?	0	84	3.55	0.718
do you think this child feels about it?	0	83	3.51	0.755
does this child's siblings feel about it?	22	61	3.36	0.949
does your wider family feel about you home-schooling?	2	82	2.60	1.07
are you about the degree of social interaction your child gets?	0	84	3.02	1.07
are you in being able to meet the needs of this child?	0	84	3.33	0.869
are you about continuing to home-school this child?	1	83	3.47	0.846
How capable do you feel with home-schooling your child as they get older?	1	82	3.27	0.890
Others—please list	18	4		

Note. Range is 1 = little positive; 2 = somewhat positive; 3 = quite positive; 4 = very positive.

An additional comment by one parent referred to home-schooling a child who was gifted. They suggested that while their child was thriving and confident having developed so many social skills, they considered that the "... government should make sure there's a school for kids like these. They do not magically appear when they're 12 years old and high school age, they deserve decent schooling as well before that".

14. Developing Scales

Mean responses were calculated for the total number of items in each of the five Likert scales to provide a set of total scale scores (Table 7). The most positive scale responses were received regarding parental feelings about home-schooling. Overall, very little use was made of potential support available.

Table 7. Means and SD of the five Likert scales.

Scales	Mean	SD	N of Items	N of Valid Responses	Cronbach's Alpha
Daily Practice	2.43	0.81	4	68	0.828
Use of Support	1.97	0.43	12	3	
Satisfying Government Requirements	2.33	0.65	11	70	0.890
Satisfaction with Government home education moderator support	2.60	0.79	9	25	0.864
Feelings about home-schooling	3.21	0.71	8	57	0.896

Note. Range is 1 = little; 2 = somewhat; 3 = quite; 4 = very.

Due to the very small number of participants who responded to all items in the Use of Support scale, the reliability is not recorded. The number of respondents in the Satisfaction with the Government Home Education Moderator was also limited at 25. Even though the Alpha is reported for this scale, interpretation needs to be made with caution.

A one-way between subjects Analysis of Variance was undertaken for each of the valid Likert total scale scores for the seven independent variables of geolocation (urban, rural), gender (male, female), school type (Catholic, government, independent), identified child (eldest, disability, ALNs), age of child when deciding to home-school (3–11, 12–14 years),

attendance when commencing home-schooling (mainstream, at home), and current age of child (3–11, 12–17 years). Cronbach's alpha for the scales when reported was high.

No significant differences were found for six of the independent variables across the scales of daily practice or receiving government support (see Table 8).

Table 8. No significant differences for daily practice and receiving government moderator support, for six independent variables.

Independent Variables	Categories	Daily Practice		Govt. Moderator Support	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Geolocation	Urban	2.42	0.836	2.63	0.779
	Rural	2.48	0.760	2.46	0.892
Gender	Male	2.39	0.739	2.48	0.810
	Female	2.47	0.892	2.77	0.780
School Type	Catholic	2.45	0.758	2.79	0.795
	Government	2.47	0.875	2.58	0.780
	Independent	2.56	0.815	2.42	0.947
Identified Child	Disability	2.56	0.870	2.55	0.777
	ALNs	2.55	0.747	2.21	0.857
	Eldest	2.27	0.789	2.76	0.758
Attendance	Mainstream	2.48	0.821	2.57	0.789
	At home	2.17	0.650	2.81	0.730
Current age of child	K-Year 6	2.56	0.807	2.46	0.800
	Years 7–12	2.28	0.817	2.73	0.781

The attendance of the child when deciding to home-school, however, gave significantly different responses for the two scales relating to satisfying government requirements and personal feelings about home-schooling. Significantly different levels of parental experiences were found regarding how easy it had been to satisfy government requirements, $F(1, 78) = 8.850, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.10$; and parental feelings about home-schooling $F(1, 77) = 8.819, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.10$. If the child was attending a mainstream school when the decision was made to home-school then the parents found it harder to meet government requirements ($M = 2.69, SD = 0.61$), than did those whose child was already home-schooled ($M = 3.12, SD = 0.61$). Personal feelings about home-schooling were also less positive when the child had been attending a mainstream school ($M = 3.03, SD = 0.74$), than if already home-schooled ($M = 3.52, SD = 0.52$).

Similarly, the needs of the child gave significantly different responses to the ease of fulfilling government requirements $F(2, 81) = 4.164, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.21$; and to parental feelings about home-schooling $F(2, 82) = 4.734, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.23$. Tukey's post hoc procedure indicated that those whose child had an ALN ($M = 2.54, SD = 0.76$) found it significantly more difficult to satisfy government requirements than parents did for the child without specific needs ($M = 3.02, SD = 0.57$). A similar response was found for the child with an ALN ($M = 2.87, SD = 0.64$), resulting in parents expressing less positive overall feelings about home-schooling compared to those of children without an ALN ($M = 3.42, SD = 0.63$).

Further significant differences were found for the age of the child when starting to home-school for satisfying government requirements $F(1, 79) = 4.131, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.05$. and for personal feelings about home-schooling $F(1, 78) = 6.014, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.07$. Satisfying government requirements was significantly more difficult when the child was primary aged ($M = 2.87, SD = 0.65$), than when secondary aged ($M = 2.43, SD = 0.44$). Conversely, parental feelings about home-schooling were more positive when the child was younger ($M = 3.24, SD = 0.63$), than older ($M = 2.64, SD = 1.08$); although this varied quite considerably for the older group. In addition, a range of sources of support were used significantly more frequently for the child starting home-schooling $F(1, 78) = 4.235, p < 0.05, \eta^2 = 0.05$, when older ($M = 2.24, SD = 0.595$), than for the younger child ($M = 1.94, SD = 0.406$).

15. Discussion

In summary, the key findings were related to the process for registering and providing an appropriate learning program, the role of the moderator, type of study and support utilized, if the student had a disability or ALNs, and links to inclusion. It is a legal requirement in all states and territories in Australia that parents register their child for home-schooling [14], although there are many reports of under registration, where parents have not registered with the appropriate body [12,15]. The process for registering differs for each jurisdiction. Parents in the current study stated that the process for registering and providing an acceptable learning environment for home-schooling in Western Australia was quite easy. This situation has the potential to change if WA follows the example of some other states, such as QLD, where more stringent registration requirements for home-schooling are required; including the need to develop and submit an educational plan which demonstrates a parent's high-quality of education prior to registration, and to provide an annual report on the child's progress for the registration to remain current [16].

In general, parents indicated that they found it relatively easy to satisfy the requirements for home-schooling in Western Australia, including undergoing moderation by a person designated by the Department of Education. The home education moderator's role is to report back to the department on the progress of the child [13]. Regarding the role of the allocated home education moderator, parents perceived that they were quite satisfied with the frequency of contact and the number of meetings that were held. They were, nevertheless, not overly supportive of the actual role of the moderator. In particular, there was a lack of continuity or development of a strong relationship with the family. Recent research in Israel [17] found that inspectors (similar to home education moderators) held significantly different views from parents regarding academic aspects, the effect of home-schooling on emotional and behavioral problems, social interaction, and attitudes towards the practice of home-schooling. The author suggested that both parties had a one-sided view of home-schooling that differed. To ensure an effective interaction, it would be deemed necessary for home education moderators to develop a good working rapport with the family as they are a source of information and to be able to support the work of the parents. In WA, the parents indicated that they were only somewhat satisfied with the support provided, especially in relation to developing a curriculum.

Of the participants, almost all indicated that they engaged in structured formal work for at least 15 h per week. Similarly, unstructured work was equally as frequently recorded, indicating flexible and varied teaching approaches, which is also evident in other countries [3]. Parents noted that a wide variety of practices were used to realize the home-schooling experience for their child. Surprisingly, however, only a small number of parents identified the use of excursions during a standard home-schooling week, with a few even stating that they do not use this form of learning at all. This finding varies with the literature that suggests excursions/field trips are often a significant part of developing learning experiences in a natural context [11,18].

As parents who are home-schooling are not readily able to access the typical range of supports available in schools, consideration was given to the type of supports they favored using and the extent to which this occurred. Research by [9] previously noted the highly variable ways in which home-schooling parents organized their curriculum. While it was evident that in WA a similar wide variety of support was used by parents, very little was utilized to any great extent. General online resources, libraries, and specialist support accounted for the greatest use of external support. Although additional sources of support were not overly used, they were used more frequently with high school children than with primary school children. The use of excursions to support a child's learning was employed by less than half of the home-schooling parents. The use of online curriculum/resources was also only cited by half of the parents. Overall, home-schooling was considered a positive experience for the parents and their family. They were, however, not overly positive about what they believed their wider families thought about them home-schooling.

The national push in Australia towards a more inclusive schooling system continues to mirror the international expectations for inclusive education [19]. This involves greater inclusion of learners with disabilities and ALNs in regular schools and classrooms. Although data in this research do not attempt to identify a causal link between this and home-schooling, the increased interest internationally in home-schooling for learners with special needs [6] raises an issue that needs further attention. The data reported here about implementation of home-schooling included responses from parents of 32% of learners who were identified as having a disability, and a further 19% with ALNs, thus accounting for approximately half of the cohort. Granting this is not a comprehensive study and is only representative of one state, and not of all home-schooling families, the proportion of children with special needs being home-schooled is still significantly high.

The inclusion movement in Australia has become the expected norm for all schools across all jurisdictions [20]. Inclusion was implemented to provide a more equitable approach to education for all learners; however, it continues to be fraught with challenges when aiming to include learners with some specific needs [21]. As diversity increases, it has been found that the pressure on teachers similarly increases [22]. A recently published Australian enquiry framed by the human rights of people with disability [23], emphasized the need for critical measures to improve inclusive educational systems, with significant reforms needing to be made to mainstream schools to remove substantial barriers to students with a disability. With 65% of this cohort attending a mainstream school prior to home-schooling, and with almost half being identified with a special need, these findings would tend to support the concerns raised by the royal commission. To provide a more effective education for their children, parents appear to be progressively taking on home-schooling [4]. With inclusion being focused on ensuring high quality and effective education for all learners, there is now emerging a similar need to ensure how the heightened uptake of home-schooling can be monitored effectively to enable the same appropriate outcome for those not attending a formal school.

16. Conclusions

In Australia, a national system The Nationally Consistent Collection of Data (NCCD), collates annual data on the numbers and adjustments required to support learners with a disability [24]. This provides education authorities and local governments with information about the level of needs of all learners identified with a disability and is linked to federal funding to help schools support them. Being linked with the Disability Standards for Education (DSE) [25], it aims to ensure a more nationally equitable approach for offering support to learners with disabilities. Funding through the NCCD, nevertheless, is not geared towards learners with ALNs who constitute an increasing number of students.

Parents in Western Australia have reported that a key reason for withdrawing their child and choosing to home-school them was their dissatisfaction with the mainstream and their child's needs not being met; and this was more noticeable when the child had an ALN [4]. These data on implementation of home-schooling found that such reactive reasons for home-schooling led to less positive feelings about home-schooling and parents finding it harder to satisfy government requirements. If a child started to be home-schooled early in K-6, parents used less sources of support and found it harder to satisfy government requirements; but were more positive about the experience overall.

It remains to be seen how well schools will cope with increasing diversity and more complex learner needs, and the ongoing relationship this may have with the increasing numbers of parents choosing to home-school and the challenges they face with implementing this, and the government will face with monitoring it.

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