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HOME-SCHOOLING IN SOUTH AFRICA: ADAPTING TO THE NEW NORMAL OF PROVIDING EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

Interest in home-schooling is increasing especially in the era of COVID-19. This pandemic has raised concern among many parents about the future education of their children. Home-schooling is increasingly seen as a safer and more viable option. This paper aims to gauge the potential of home-schooling based on the experiences and perspectives of parents who are home educators. This study delves into aspects such as the advantages and disadvantages of contemporary home-schooling experiences. Using a qualitative approach, this research draws on 10 semi-structured interviews with parents who are currently home-schooling their children in order to understand their lived experiences. The study finds that most parents opted for home-schooling to ensure that their children had access to an affordable, high-quality form of education. Furthermore, parents wanted to ensure that each child was provided with an individualised experience, which is particularly beneficial for those with special needs. However, some parents struggled to find the balance between their role as a parent and a teacher. Additionally, the lack of support from the government was outlined as a prominent challenge. The study recommends a more nuanced and integrated approach from policymakers and the government to ensure a safe and efficient home-schooling environment.

Keywords: *home-schooling, learners, parents, home-based education, South Africa*

1. INTRODUCTION

Home-schooling is relatively widespread in more developed countries (Ray, 2015, 2016a) but is also gaining momentum in many developing countries, including South Africa (Ebrahim, 2020). It gives children the opportunity to learn in an atmosphere that is different from the mainstream public or private schooling sector (Ray, 2016b). Home-schooling is where parents, a designated teacher or tutor takes primary responsibility for providing education for the learner (Donnelly, 2012; Moore, Lemmer & van Wyk, 2004). It is an informal learning environment that provides children with a rich social experience that is more natural in enabling them to discover different things and learn through experiences (Mills, 2009). Home-schooling is strictly regulated by the

government in terms of attendance, progression and continuous assessment; however, parents are solely responsible for the decisions regarding their children's education. This firmly establishes their control and sovereignty within the home-schooling environment (Winstanley, 2009). Parents can take over the role of mentors or use the services of a certified teacher to provide instruction using an accredited curriculum (Moore *et al.,* 2004).

During the apartheid era, South Africa experienced major difficulties regarding equal access to education that was especially pronounced within Black African communities (Kallaway, 1984; Kallaway, 2002; Levin, 1991; Nkomo, 1990). However, in 1996 the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa guaranteed equal access to education regardless of ethnicity. The South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 recognises home-schooling and requires education to be transformed into a democratic system where non-sexism, non-racism, human dignity, rights, equality and freedom are valued (RSA, 1996a, 1996c). Although there has been a concerted effort to improve education in the democratic era, residual effects of apartheid are still apparent in disadvantaged communities (Dodge & Welderufael, 2014). Apartheid ended more than 20 years ago, yet many schools remain without basic facilities (Simkins, 2013). The effects of apartheid are still experienced daily as many South African students, especially those within the most impoverished communities, lack the basic educational resources that they require (Dodge & Welderufael, 2014). These issues within the South African education system are likely to influence parents to consider alternative measures for their children to acquire a good quality education (Mills, 2009).

Although home-schooling has enjoyed a fair amount of exposure in the media in South Africa, it is not recognised as a priority area. Therefore, there is a need to explore the potential of home-schooling in South Africa within the broader social context as an alternative for parents who are concerned about current available options. Further, South Africa is currently experiencing the devastating effects of COVID-19, which has widespread implications for the country. At the end of March 2020, a nation-wide lockdown was imposed that led to the closure of all sectors considered non-essential, including schools.

Embarking on a nation-wide effort to salvage the academic year, the South African government announced a plan for the gradual opening of schools. However, many stakeholders, including parents, have voiced their disapproval of children returning to school, as many schools are ill-equipped to deal with the current pandemic (May, 2020; McDonald, 2020). Public sector schools are largely under-resourced and lack the necessary protective equipment and resources to safeguard students and staff, while parents of children in private schools are also concerned about the potential for acquiring the virus in the school environment. As a result, many learners will not be returning to the classrooms and many parents are forced to re-think their educational options and the learning environment (McDonald, 2020). In this context, home-schooling is seen as an alternative form of learning.

There are various terms that refer to home-schooling such as home-based education, home education, un-schooling, home-centred learning, home instruction, de-schooling, autonomous learning and child-centred learning (Donnelly, 2012). In its simplest form, home-schooling is the education of school-aged children at home (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007). However, every term or concept has its philosophical underpinnings, context and various factors that influence how people define it (Donnelly, 2012). For the purpose of this study, home-schooling is defined according to the South African National Education Policy Act No. 27 of 1996 (RSA, 1996b), as an alternative form of learning that takes place outside the government designated

public or private school environment, and primarily conducted at home with parents as the principal instructors of academic knowledge (de Waal & Theron, 2003; Mills, 2009).

Research suggests that a structured, controlled and organised home-schooling environment can prove to be effective in enhancing academic success of the learner (Cogan, 2010; Harding, 2003; Rudner, 1999). Generally, the decision to home-school is due to dissatisfaction with the formal education system (Morton, 2010). A South African study conducted by Moore *et al.* (2004) revealed that parents were dissatisfied with the schools that their children attended. The parents cited the curriculum, the system of reward and punishment and the emphasis of the school on technology as the reasons for their dissatisfaction. Thus, the family's decision to home-school was a response to this and they felt that the home-school environment created a new setting in which principles of child discipline could be applied (Moore *et al*, 2004). Additionally, parents are able to exert more control over the moral and social aspects of the child's upbringing that may be absent or challenging in mainstream schools (Morton, 2010; Spiegler, 2010). However, the current body of South African literature lacks contemporary, empirical evidence of the lived daily experiences of home-schooling. While there are studies that exist, these are outdated; thus, a renewed perspective into home-schooling is needed (Van Schalkwyk & Bouwer, 2011). To address this gap, this study seeks to explore the potential of home-schooling as an educational alternative amid the global pandemic. The study is particularly interested in investigating contemporary experiences of home-schooling among parents who identify as home educators in an urban area in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The paper is concerned with the following key question: What are the experiences of home-schooling among parents who identify as home-educators in an urban area in KwaZulu-Natal? The overall aim of this study is to broaden understanding of home-schooling in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, by specifically focusing on the perspective of parents. The study focuses on the province of KwaZulu-Natal because it has one of the highest estimates of registered home-educators in the country (Wits Education Policy Unit, 2008). Additionally, KwaZulu-Natal has the highest population of learners in the public school sector (Department of Basic Education, 2018).

2. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative approach to capture the perspectives and experiences of parents who identified as home-educators in South Africa. Given the nature of the study, using qualitative methods allowed for an in-depth understanding of the key experiences of parents (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2011; Patton & Cochran, 2002). The primary data collection tool consisted of semi-structured interviews with a series of open-ended questions. The study employed purposive and snowball sampling strategies (Patton & Cochran, 2002), as the intended study sample was a particular home-schooling population that can be difficult to reach. This was beneficial in recruiting eligible study participants, as home-schooling is not a common occurrence in South Africa. In order to be eligible to participate in the study parents needed to be currently involved in home-schooling of one or more children and reside within the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. Ten participants were interviewed for this study. The aim of the study was not to generalise but rather to provide detailed accounts of home-schooling from the perspective of parents; hence, relying on the gains of information power.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Human Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (protocol reference number: HSS/0300/017M). Participants were assured that their identities would remain protected. Pseudonyms instead

of real names were used in the reporting of the findings. Once eligible participants agreed to partake in the study the interview was arranged. The interviews were conducted within their homes as they felt that it provided them with a sense of comfort and privacy. The interview guide covered a broad range of topics including socio-economic and demographic characteristics of parents, their understanding of home-based education, reasons for home-schooling, challenges and benefits associated with home-schooling as well as the feasibility and accessibility of home-schooling.

Participants signed consent forms to indicate their understanding of the study purpose and willingness to participate. They were also informed that they may withdraw from the study at any point with no implications for them. They were also asked to provide their consent for the interview to be audio-recorded. Each interview was audio-recorded and thereafter transcribed verbatim and analysed. For the study, thematic analysis was used, which involves sorting the data into particular themes (Hayes, 2000). Themes are defined as ideas or topics that emerge on more than one occasion during the interviews. The emerging themes were then categorised and analysed. From the outset of the analysis, certain key features emerged from the transcripts, which were categorised into particular themes: definition of home-schooling, advantages and challenges of home-schooling.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Characteristics of the study sample

Table 1 below displays the characteristics of the study sample. All, except for one, were female. In addition, the participants were married and educated. The majority (9 out of 10) of the study sample had a tertiary level education and only one female had completed her secondary education. When the participants were asked about the number of children that they are currently home-schooling, five indicated that they were home-schooling two children; three one child; one three children and another one was home-schooling four children.

Table 1:   Characteristics of the study sample

Characteristic		N	%
Gender	Female	9	90
	Male	1	10
	Total	10	100
Race	White	10	100
	Other	0	0
	Total	10	100
Marital status	Married	10	100
	Unmarried	0	0
	Total	10	100
Education	Primary	0	0
	Secondary	1	10
	Tertiary	9	90
	Total	10	100

Characteristic		N	%
No. of children home-schooled	1	3	30
	2	5	50
	3	1	10
	4	1	10
	Total	10	100

3.2 Attitudes towards home-schooling

The rise of home-schooling over the years has grown in popularity (Burke & Movement, 2009), with many parents appreciating its flexibility and the freedom of choice to utilise a variety of teaching strategies. This affords home-educators greater options to accommodate individual learner's needs and personal circumstances (Lines, 2000; Olatunji, 2014). Parents indicated that the choice to home-school presented an opportunity for them to provide a specialised learning experience for their children in the comfort of their own home with either the father or the mother acting as the teacher. They highlighted the individuality of the home-schooling experience, indicating that it is more personalised than mainstream schooling and allows for an educational approach directed towards customised learning suited to the needs of the child.

> *There is a huge difference, with the mainstream. It is this way or no way. It is very academic they are not willing to stir from anything. I think personally it is not correct. There are no real-life situations where you are thrown into the same room every day with 50 people, and you are forced to get along with them. On the playground, you are limited to run around for a few minutes. With home-schooling you can tailor make learning for each child, even if you have four children in the home you can work according to each child, and you can go at each child's pace. Unlike mainstream, where you got to keep up, or you get left behind, so there is a big difference* (Participant 2).

Parents stated that they opted for home-schooling because they believed that children are unique and should be afforded the opportunity to develop at their own pace. They have a positive attitude towards home-schooling and adopted it for the primary benefit of their children. They felt that their children needed to be offered a holistic education that encourages individuality, which they felt was missing in mainstream education.

> *When we talk about education, we never talk one-sided, ever! Children are individuals, and I think we often forget we are dealing with individuals. If you mind their individuality, mind that special person and ask "who do you have the potential to be one day?" The classroom is so big; teachers cannot get to the child as an individual. When you talk about education, you need to be looking at it as a whole: "Who is this person? Who is this individual? How can I mind and educate them holistically?" Education is not only on paper, based on one method and one-sided. I feel they want our children to be the same; they are just teaching the same concept and want them to be robotic. We are all individuals, we all have so much to contribute, and that is what is missing in the mainstream, a way to encourage individuality and educate holistically* (Participant 10).

Parents further described mainstream schools as rigid and not accommodating to the varying needs of individuals. In addition, they argued that the class size in mainstream schools are very large, consisting of approximately 50 learners, which results in limited focus on the individual. Parents who are not satisfied with conventional schooling feel that their children do not receive enough attention to help them develop through the education system. Children feel pressure to complete a set of activities within a closely defined time in order to progress

to the next level. They preferred home-schooling because there is greater flexibility and the teaching experience can be tailored to the needs of each individual. This allows children to receive the undivided attention and commitment of the home-educator (Mills, 2009), which poses as a challenge in larger, mainstream classrooms. Parents felt that this is beneficial with one describing their children as being stress-free, relaxed and generally happy.

> *It is the best thing I ever did for my children. It allows each child to learn in a way that suits them. It also gives me insight into where they excel and where they have difficulties. I have absolutely no doubt that I am doing the right thing. My children love school; they have a love of learning and reading. They are unstressed, relaxed and happy. I would recommend it for those that have the need and the desire, your heart and commitment need to be there. I believe it is the way of the future* (Participant 5).

3.3 Advantages of home-schooling

3.3.1 Quality and care

All of the parents felt that they were able to provide a better education for their children than they would receive from public or other mainstream schools. One parent stated that they felt that South Africa has a low standard of education, especially for subjects such as mathematics and science, and that a good quality education is available via the home-schooling curricula, much of the content being free.

> *We are aware that South Africa has the second lowest standard of education in the world, and the lowest standard of maths and science. Whereas, good quality education is available in boxed curricula as well as online, much being free* (Participant 5).

Parents indicated that they wanted a high-quality education for their children and felt that they are in the best position to provide it. They wanted to adopt a system that does not impair their children's development or hinders them from progressing, and to provide a more appropriate learning programme, especially those who have special needs. One parent explains that her child was considered "problematic" as she was not able to concentrate and was not performing at the average level of the other learners. However, directing more time and attention towards the child has allowed her to build a solid learning foundation and make satisfactory progress.

> *My youngest daughter has always been seen as a problem child which she is not. I took her out of school because the first term of grade one teachers had already picked up three problems; she was performing below average, she was a roadie and could not concentrate. My daughter has problems with concentration so she needs more time with me just to consolidate concepts and make sure her foundation is solid* (Participant 6).

Four of the parents had children that were reliant on medication to cope in the mainstream system and wanted a learning environment for the children that does not require them to be medicated. Learning difficulties were a strong motivation for choosing to home-school, and can be challenging to accommodate in a classroom environment (Mills, 2009); hence, parents felt that they were able to educate their children in an environment that does not mandate the use of medication. Ritalin (a type of stimulant medication) is often advised as a way for some children to cope in the mainstream school environment. Parents are concerned with the type of properties that Ritalin has that is similar to cocaine (a narcotic substance). It has side-effects that suppress emotions and ideas, and diminishes self-esteem (Powers *et al*., 2008).

> *My son is far behind in school, with reading, maths and every other subject, he is two years behind. We decided to home-school because of the label teachers put on our children, that medication is the only way. Ritalin! Ritalin! Ritalin! The side effects! I cannot believe the side effects of Ritalin* (Participant 2).

Another parent was unable to find a school that could accommodate the special needs of the child. Parents wanted to ensure that their children would be provided with appropriate care and education within the learning environment and home-schooling presented itself as a "wonderful" option where they would not be subjected to any form of neglect or abuse.

> *I was unable to find a school for my mentally challenged child. For those children with learning difficulties and special needs, home education can be a wonderful option as there are few special needs schools* (Participant 5).

3.3.2 Academic enhancement

All the parents indicated that being involved in their children's education is a rewarding experience as they are able to understand the individual process of learning for their children, what they are interested in and how well they absorb information. If the child struggles with any concept they have the advantage to work on it before moving to another concept. This way the children are able to fully grasp a concept before proceeding further. They are able to help their children without the pressure of working at the pace of a collective group of learners. Parents felt that this approach helped their children to achieve more in a short space of time. As a result, many of the parents were satisfied with the results of home-schooling based on their children's academic performance. One parent shared the difficulties that she encountered with her son who was displaying poor work effort however, home-schooling enabled him to advance academically as well as provided an environment for him to reach his full potential.

> *My children are excelling academically as home-scholars. Home-schooling allows us to enrich our children's strengths and supplement their weaknesses. The child's education moves as fast or as slow as required for that particular subject area. We can work on the child's behaviour and work ethic throughout the day. My son's poor work effort at school was nearly impossible to address. The teachers did not have time to make my son repeat work they felt was average quality. We would not see the work until days after it was completed. Finally, we have been able to push him to his full potential* (Participant 10).

Eight of the parents indicated that academic performance does not only depend on assessment criteria that their children need to achieve. They were concerned with the quality of education that their children are exposed to which fosters a love for learning and encourages them to continuously seek opportunities to learn and develop into well-rounded individuals. They encouraged their children to pursue their interest as a way of further enhancing their educational development.

> *My son is eleven and he is two years behind in school, but I am not worried because every person learns at a different pace, he wanted to study World War 2 which is high school history, so he can study anything. I am not concerned with testing and pressurising him as he is still young* (Participant 2).

3.3.3 A flexible, individualised experience

The experience within a home-schooling environment is very different from that which is encountered within the classroom. Parents can devote an unlimited amount of time and attention to their children, as they are most likely to know their strengths and weaknesses.

When one approach fails there is the option to try a different approach or even change teaching methods. One mother stated that her child is more inclined towards practical learning methods; however, they have tailored a method to ensure that he can inclusively incorporate reading as well. This individualised approach has aided the child to develop a love for reading.

> *The freedom of the child to learn the way their brain operates. My child is very practical, he likes doing things with his hands. Reading was never his thing, but I have to trick him. I got him a toy, a train and we had to assemble it but first, we had to read the manual, now he enjoys reading especially if it is for his projects, he builds those prototypes; a water well and irrigation systems and they all require reading a manual* (Participant 7).

Parents believed that the home-school environment offered stability and flexibility such as a customised learning schedule as well as school holidays. Seven of the parents have a structured routine that helps in guiding the children's daily activities. One parent allows her youngest daughter to play a musical instrument before beginning her day, as this is calming for the child and allows her to focus throughout the day.

> *On average we start at 7:30am. I am very structured and routine. It is school at home. My youngest daughter starts playing the cello at 7:30am; music calms her and helps her focus. Every day is different; we have a break at 9:30am for an hour, then we are back at it until 1:00pm or 1:30pm* (Participant 6).

Parents who home-school can teach anywhere, which means that their classroom is not limited to the home, and they can take trips during the school year, visit relatives and take vacations. Learning is a year-round experience and home-schooling provides for this. The continuum of experience is an important factor in learning and should not be interrupted by the calendar (Martin, 1997). However, parents indicated that they do consider the mainstream school calendar to ensure that their children can socialise with peers during the holidays.

> *I go according to the national school term holidays to accommodate my children's friends from mainstream school so that they get to spend time with them* (Participant 1).

3.3.4 Love, protection and values

According to Yin, Zakaria and Baharun (2016), home-schooling promotes family bonding by fostering a nurturing atmosphere, allowing families to develop strong bonds. The home-school environment reduces the generational gap between children and parents, while building good relationships among siblings. The family bonds are strengthened, as children begin to enjoy each other's company, they become friends and parents feel closer to their children. This further cultivated an environment where learning is embraced.

> *I love being with my children, and getting to know my children, spending time with them, they are my children, and I need to spend time with them. My children are happy, they are well adjusted, and they love learning* (Participant 1).

There was a feeling that the home-school environment offered protection from the many social ills that children are exposed to within formal schooling systems. Parents are particularly worried about protecting their children from harmful implications resulting from peer pressure. They noted that there are problems with bullying as well as drug and alcohol use in mainstream schools and they fear that they will not be able to protect their children from these social ills.

> *There are problems with bullying, drugs, alcohol, and sexual promiscuity in many schools* (Participant 5).

Religious and spiritual beliefs feature strongly as the motivation for home-schooling among parents. Parents emphasised family unity and surrounding their children with a loving, family-oriented environment that allows them to be nurtured in a way that is also consistent with their religious values and beliefs. The ability to include religion into the learning programme is an advantage that some parents enjoy. One parent suggested that they use a curriculum that allows for the incorporation of religion as it creates a space for their children to proclaim their faith. This is an element that is not always, or entirely incorporated in mainstream schools.

> *I am a Christian and that is my motivation. I use a curriculum that incorporates Christianity. I want my children to be able to proclaim their faith, for them to know God, live and learn about Him through the day and throughout their lives* (Participant 1).

3.4 Challenges

3.4.1 Separation of roles: Parent versus teacher

Although home-schooling is advantageous for an array of reasons, it is not without its challenges. The reality of home-schooling requires parents to play the role of teaching their children, supervising their schoolwork, evaluating their work and planning for activities (Green & Hoover-Dempsey, 2007). This demands a great deal of time and energy, and parents may then suffer emotionally from stress, frustration and a lack of motivation. This is not always the situation; however, some parents did suggest that home-schooling requires a great deal of commitment. The demand to accommodate each child individually may leave parent-educators feeling overwhelmed and frustrated (Botha, 2005). One parent found it particularly difficult to be an educator and a parent at the same time. Distinguishing between the two roles were not easy and it was challenging to remain approachable as a teacher during the set school hours, and as a parent, at the allocated family time. Another parent stressed the effectiveness of teaching methods and ensuring that the material is made enjoyable and understandable as a way to avert challenges.

> *You need to be interested in what is best for the child. I find it challenging to separate myself from being a mother and being a teacher, but in the morning I try my best to be a teacher and a mother throughout the day. Everything is so integrated and my children do everything together, and I try my level best to be approachable* (Participant 1).

One parent describes the journey of home-schooling as "lonely" as she has to take full control and responsibility, and despite support being available from other family members, such as a spouse, they need to be innovative and resourceful.

> *As the parent teaching, it can be a very lonely journey, the responsibility is completely on you as the educator. Yes, my husband has been amazing, but at the end of the day, the responsibility is on one individual* (Participant 5).

Six of the parents suggested that they need to constantly plan and organise activities, which becomes costly at times. Parents find that they have to be resourceful and the responsibility of teaching and providing relevant learning material rest upon one parent regardless of the support the parent may receive from other relatives.

> *You need to know places to get things because it is not a school setting. You as a parent have to manage all things for the children to have sports. We as parents have to arrange all activities. Activities are not always free. In order to get the best of the world and learn more while they are at it, I supplement their lessons with trips to planetariums, art exhibits,*

lectures, showcases, nature preserves and my children are enrolled in various community activities, but these things can cost money (Participant 9).

3.4.2 Lack of government support

Parents felt that the government was attempting to over-regulate home-schooling in South Africa (Van der Eems, 2017). On the contrary, West (2009) noted that it is important for the government to regulate this form of schooling due to children being at a greater risk of abuse and to avoid parents from not immunising their children, which creates a health risk for the nation. The findings suggest that there is limited government support and one parent suggests that home-schooling is actively discouraged by the government.

> *As far as I know there is no government system to support; they do not like what we are doing* (Participant 2).

> *The main challenge is the active discouragement by government. The government actively discourages home education* (Participant 5).

Owing to lack of support, parents choose to register their children with home-school associations or groups and not with the South African Department of Education. Parents were quite critical of the government in their processing of home-schooling. They fear that should they register with the Department of Education they will forfeit their freedom to choose any curriculum programme that they want. This will further forfeit the opportunity to tailor a conducive and alternative method of learning, which they feel is more suited to their children. Those that are registered with the Department of Education complain that it is generally a complicated process, which takes too long.

> *America is very big on home-schooling so the support from there is massive, for example, if you want a learning programme, you will get it from there, help is just an email away* (Participant 2).

4. DISCUSSION

In the decades since it first gained prominence, home-schooling in South Africa has transformed significantly. It has become an important part of the education system and the growing interest in home-schooling has led to the emergence of an immense industry offering support and resources to parents who choose to home-school their children (Moore *et al*., 2004). Home-schooling is expanding at approximately 20% per annum in South Africa and is projected to significantly expand in the coming years (Nhlapo, 2018). The findings from the study largely suggest that home-schooling is an option that is openly embraced by the study sample, in this instance parents that intend to provide their children with quality education that is affordable, efficient and beneficial for their child's optimum development. Parents stressed the importance of the quality of education that is provided to children. Concerns about the standard of education offered in mainstream schools, exposure to peer pressure and other social ills (such as drugs) and the inability of mainstream school to accommodate a child without the use of mental stimulants such as Ritalin were among the most prominent reasons for the decision to home-school. Parents took primary responsibility to ensure that their children were provided with a standard of education that they regarded as valuable and efficient. UNICEF (2000) suggests that quality education is inclusive of a safe and healthy environment that provides adequate resources and facilities to enable a conducive learning space. It provides content that is reflected in relevant curricula and materials that

promote the acquisition of basic skills in literacy, numeracy, life skills and knowledge. Parents indicated that the content of the curricula was of a good quality and freely available for the academic development of their children. Quality education is a teaching and learning system that strengthens the capacity of children to act progressively on their own behalf (UNICEF, 2000; 2007). As suggested by the parents, their children were able to excel academically and enhance their learning capability by using various methods that met their individual needs. Additionally, as reflected by the findings of this study and other research, it is evident that home-schooling can produce learners who are healthy, ready to participate and learn and are supported by their families (UNICEF, 2000; 2007).

The other main advantages of home-schooling include individualised educational experiences, flexibility together with freedom for a child to learn at their own pace. Education is customised to the needs of every individual, which allows the learners to develop a love for learning. In a study conducted by Thomas (2016), some families highlighted the types of courses that support particular learning styles that were available, but the majority emphasised the growth and development of their relationship as a family, as with this study, where parents valued building relationships and strengthening bonds with their children. Additionally, as evidenced by this study and other research, parents are motivated by the medical needs of their children as they view home-schooling as an educational alternative that accommodates special needs (Thomas, 2016). Parents felt that they could ensure that their children would not need to be dependent on medication and would not be neglected or abused. However, the need for home-schooling extends beyond the outlined benefits and documented contributing factors. While it is evident that quality education is of paramount importance, more recently interest in home-schooling is gaining popularity especially in the era of COVID-19.

The current global pandemic of COVID-19 is mandating that action be taken to enforce basic protective measures and safeguard students and staff from the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic there was a lack of educational resources for South African students as well as other challenges that they experienced such as occupational deprivation (Dodge & Welderufael, 2014), influenced by well-known problems such as a shortage of teachers, underqualified teachers and inadequate teacher performance (Levy, 2009). These challenges are expected to be further exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19. This presents itself as a challenge for many South African learners and as a result, parents and educators are redirecting focus towards home-schooling as an alternative option.

Most governments around the world have temporarily closed educational institutions in an attempt to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and South Africa has followed suit. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is supporting countries in their efforts to mitigate the immediate impact of school closures, particularly for more vulnerable and disadvantaged communities, and to facilitate the continuity of education for all through remote learning (UNESCO, 2020). This study presents key insights from parents who are currently home-educators and will add to the existing debate central to education and schooling across South Africa to enable parents to use the findings of this study to make an informed decision regarding home-schooling as well as plan and prepare for the challenges outlined. The study also outlines the lack of support from the government, mandating a call to action across South Africa in order to accommodate parents who plan to home-school their children. Furthermore, as evidenced by the parents in this study, the home-schooling experience is a lonely journey and it is difficult to differentiate between the role of a parent and educator. While parents acknowledge the support of relatives, it is solely

their responsibility to take full control of all aspects of the teaching experience. This proves to be challenging for parents, as this requires a consistent level of dedication and commitment, which can be tiresome and exhausting for parents. Being resourceful entails that the parent has to constantly generate new and innovative ways of teaching. Lack of support for parents who are home-educators is a common occurrence (Kidd & Kaczmarek, 2010) and although the findings acknowledge home-education as positive, the personal challenges experienced by the parent should not be overlooked. Hence, finding innovative ways to assist parents with these personal challenges will enable them to have a more positive, stress-free experience. Hence, this highlights valuable implications for practice and intervention in the sphere of home-schooling to incorporate accessibility of support outside of the family.

This study recommends the need to support parents and experts and all those who are positioned to provide education in considering alternative approaches such as home-schooling. School drop-out rates across the globe are likely to rise as a result of this massive disruption to education access. This is further compounded by the fear, anxiety and stress of becoming infected and the lack of preparedness of the education sector to deal with reducing the opportunities for infection. This study opens platforms to address issues such as how South African parents prepare and adapt to home-schooling. This is an effort to mitigate the disruption caused by COVID-19 and establish approaches to develop more open and flexible education systems for the future (UNESCO, 2020). Continuing education through alternative learning pathways needs to be a nation-wide priority to prevent students from falling behind in their learning.

5.   STUDY LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study focused on one particular geographic area and in addition, the sample size was relatively small. The aim of the researchers was to gain key insights on an under-studied population and thus enhance information-power. In light of this limitation, it is recommended that future studies of a similar nature expand in their scope of geographic location and incorporate a diverse study sample. This research recommends a deeper investigation into home-schooling; one that captures contemporary perspectives and experiences of the home-educator and learners. This is recommended based on the scarcity of studies that consider the feasibility of home education in South Africa. A deeper investigation into accessibility and functionality of home-schooling as an alternative option needs to be explored especially since many parents across South Africa are increasingly showing interest in this platform of learning. This will aid in the revision and implementation of existing policies and initiatives central to home-schooling.

Furthermore, on the basis of the challenges documented in this study, it is also recommended that the government needs to be supportive of the home-schooling sector and encourage parents to adopt this as a viable strategy to ensure that the education sector is supported in their transition from disruption to recovery during the global pandemic. This approach should be holistic and inclusive to ensure that researchers, parents, policymakers and the education sector details a concerted response that allows thinking and acting accordingly to adjust to a "new normal". As a start, nation-wide awareness of home-schooling should be publicised and information should be readily and easily available.

The scope of quantitative studies on home-schooling is almost non-existent especially in South Africa; therefore, future research should consider adopting a quantitative approach

where a descriptive database captures detailed and statistical information about the socio-economic status, marital status, employment status, educational level, type of curricula and geographic-specific demand for home-schooling. This will enable the government and relevant institutions to plan and prepare accordingly for the expected influx of home-schoolers.

6. CONCLUSION

Home-schooling has been recognised as an alternative and viable option, allowing children to continue their education in the comfort of their homes and affording parents the full responsibility of providing a protective, safe and clean environment. However, there are a number of challenges that need to be considered and addressed that are largely central to the lack of support from the government and the tedious administrative processes involved. Additionally, the current pandemic has resulted in many parents considering how to provide their children with education to prevent them from contracting the virus. In light of the great disruption that the pandemic has brought, the government needs to consider ways of providing instruction to children that does not require them to physically attend school. The discussion on home-schooling needs to be broadened in the country to accommodate those in circumstances who cannot make the full transition, but where the principles can be applied to fill short-term gaps when the education environment is not conducive to learning.

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