

Reasons why parents home school in Australia: A national survey and a review of 2018-2022 registrations

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An increase of parents choosing to home school their children within Australia and changing motivations to do so, has been suggested, however national figures of home school student registrations have not been available and quantitative data is minimal, resulting in a risk of unvalidated assumptions informing the industry. Our study collated a national student registration figure for home education within Australia covering the years 2018-2022 and showing percentage increase and a growth rate exceeding other schooling options. In addition, we modernised the *Enrolment Motivation Questionnaire* (Collom, 2005) updating it for theoretical developments to investigate the motivations of Australian parents who choose home schooling both pre and post-Covid. This analysis revealed two significant differences: after the advent of Covid, parents were motivated to home school their children due to school absences and child's health, compared to before Covid. We discuss the finding that home education is currently the fastest growing schooling modality in Australia and how parents' schooling choice is changing to be more child-centric, offering factor analysis results which support this addition.

The growth of home education

Home education, also known as home schooling, is the educational practice where parents take the full responsibility for providing their children's formal education. Whilst it is rare in some countries and illegal in others, home schooling is increasing in popularity around the world, including in Australia (English, 2021; Green-Hennessy & Mariotti, 2023; Ray, 2024).

In the US, Brian Ray, president of the National Home Education Research Institute, has documented the steady growth in home schooling student numbers in the US for more than 30 years (Ray, 2024). Ray's records demonstrated an unusually sharp increase in student numbers in recent years where student numbers jumped from 2.6 million in 2020 to 3.7 million in 2021. This figure represents 6-7% of all school-aged children in the USA, with researchers stating that home education may be the fastest-growing form of education in the US, today (Hamlin & Peterson, 2022; Ray, 2024).

There is not a similar comprehensive calculation of the numbers of home educated students in Australia. However, it has been suggested that the number of children home educating in Australia has increased in recent years (English, 2021). In addition, because there are significant numbers of home educated students within Australia, who are not registered (English, 2021; Home Education Australia Queensland Chapter, 2019), the true number is likely to be much higher than official government figures.

Problematic of reported home education figures is a lack of consistent reporting by states and territories and a lack of nationwide collection of data. Most recently, English (2021)

analysed home education student registrations but was able to access data from only Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, and Australian Capital Territory, comprising only four of Australia's eight states and territories. Student registrations of 18,947 for the year 2020 were calculated from the data obtained by English (2021). In 2019, Jackson reported a total of 19,984 home education registrations across all Australian states and territories (Jackson, 2019). It is almost certain that student registrations have increased within Australia, based on the 2019 figures and the partial 2020 figures.

Since Jackson's (2019) collation, a nationwide student registration figure has not been obtained, and never has one been offered outside of industry, yet these adjacent years are of interest due to the impact of Covid-19. In line with the sharp increase in the United States in recent years (Ray, 2024) and the indication of increase in Australian figures, it is necessary to obtain and report student registration numbers across preceding years to current. However, as mentioned, these official figures will not account for the percentage of families who chose not to register with authorities and will always be an underestimate of the actual total. Our research will firstly provide a review of current Australian home education student registrations and proceed to investigate what has motivated the purported increase in student registrations.

Theoretical understanding of parental motivations towards home education

Reasons parents choose to home educate have been studied for many years. Van Galen (1988) categorised home educators into two groups, and thereby defined motivations generally. One group was deemed to be "pedagogues", highlighting their focus on improved instructional processes. The other group - those who chose to home educate their children for religious and philosophical reasons - were labelled as "idealogues". Murphy et al. (2017) concluded that whilst Van Galen's pedagogical and ideological archetypal categories are still relevant, the reasons parents choose to home school are now believed to be diverse and complex. Furthermore, the recent increase of interest in home education identified by Ray (2024) and suggested in Australia by the above figures, leads us to investigate whether novel motivating factors have influenced this increase or if a strengthening of existing motivations have contributed to this effect. It is therefore necessary to review the specific motivations identified in the literature to date.

Overall, there has been consistency of constructs with some notable differences in their formation. Collom (2005) developed a questionnaire instrument to measure parent motivations and identified four areas of parental motivations including: (i) religious values; (ii) dissatisfaction with the public schools; (iii) academic/pedagogical concerns; and (iv) family preferences which largely structured around the needs of the family and individual child. Redford et al. (2017) utilising the National Household Education Survey Program data ultimately agreed with three of Collom's motivators: (i) school environments; (ii) dissatisfaction with academics of schools; and (iii) a desire to provide moral instruction. While family preference was not identified by Redford et al. it has been confirmed by others (Slater et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2019). Moreover, family preference now may seem

to be two separate constructs: the unique needs of the child and the needs of the family. Parents identified caring for a special-needs child or a child with physical or mental health problems as distinct from a desire for a non-traditional schooling approach likened to family lifestyle choices (Wang et al., 2019). Slater et al. (2022), researching Australian families, conducted thematic analysis finding a distinction of children's needs as a separate motivator to those related to the general needs of the family. While this is similar to Wang et al.'s (2019) findings, Wang and colleagues found religious motivations remained as a distinct construct from family needs, as did Collom, whereas Slater et al. (2022) included religious reasons within the family needs construct. Slater et al. also agreed that parents' dissatisfaction with the academic underachievement of the schooling system was a motivator.

In summary, the research results of why parents choose home education suggest five reasons: (i) children's idiosyncratic needs; (ii) lifestyle family choices; (iii) religious/ideological reasons; (iv) general dissatisfaction with education systems; and (v) general dissatisfaction with school environments. Research has included questionnaires using construct analysis and qualitative methods. One critique of the current research is that there has been an increased emphasis on qualitative data and limited reliance on questionnaire development (Forlin et al., 2023). We note that both approaches are evidenced in the literature, however questionnaire development has indeed been lacking most recently. Given that there is often a cycle of theory development utilising qualitative investigation leading to questionnaire development, this critique might be an indication of the imminent need to reconsider questionnaire development. Moreover, there is not a validated questionnaire which can be used that includes the constructs currently accepted within the literature and one is necessary to increase the possibility of research that investigates parental motivations and other correlative factors using a quantitative perspective. The current research will therefore facilitate the modification of parent motivation questionnaires utilising the constructs identified within the literature.

Could COVID have exposed further factors influencing parents to choose home education?

One such research question in which a quantitative study is of value is considering the impact of Covid on the uptake of home education. The possible surge in home schooling within Australia and other countries leads us to consider whether certain societal factors might align with the known parental motivations towards home schooling thus explaining the purported increase. Others have suggested a connection between Covid and an increase in home schooling interest (English, 2021). We can see this connection broadly as the pandemic effected short to mid-term changes in societal behaviour and how these could also align to parent motivations discussed above. For instance, the general dissatisfaction with the government has increased due to Covid (Becher et al., 2021). Considering that in Australia, the government is heavily involved in the public school system and structurally involved in all other schooling systems, this feature may have influenced the general dissatisfaction with the education systems, increasing parental motivations towards home schooling.

In addition, the phenomenon termed the 'Great Resignation' and the increase in flexible working arrangements indicated dissatisfaction with work/life balance and the unhealthy impact of employment structures on the quality family life (Liu-Lastres et al., 2022). Families affected by this short-term restructure of work, or otherwise prompted to evaluate family lifestyle, may have felt a drawing towards home schooling. Finally, resistance to vaccination, especially in children, evidences a psychological salience of children's unique needs within the society at large (Ceannt et al., 2022; Fisher et al., 2022), as such, this may have influenced parents motivated by children's unique needs towards home schooling. Parental motivations to home education such as dissatisfaction with government schools, family life, and unique needs of children have been previously identified in the literature and we have shown how these motivations may have been affected by the pandemic similar to those expressed in other societal responses to Covid-19. Therefore, it is necessary to quantifiably assess the motivations of parents who chose to home educate in Australia before and after the start of Covid-19.

Rationale and aim

Since Collom (2005) developed a survey tool designed to assess the motivations of parents to home educate, there has not been an attempt to capture the motivations to home education using a survey tool, excepting Forlin et al. (2023) who have begun investigations but currently have only produced data with a very small sample size (N=21). In addition, Redford et al.'s (2017) and Wang et al.'s (2019) works have used national education survey data and is based in the US, data which is not specific to home schooling but the general education system. While qualitative methods such as Slater et al. (2022) are valuable for exploration and rich data collection, they are not able to measure or quantify the reasons anticipated. Psychometric principles, for instance, can be used to sort through the various reasons given by parents to find underlying themes in a quantifiable manner. Considering the possible modifications to parent reasoning described above, a quantifiable assessment is required to add to the existing literature and provide a baseline for a renewed understanding of Australian families.

There is reason to believe that recent events linked to Covid-19 may be related to a change in schooling choice by parents within Australia and hence may also explain any potential increase in home education registrations, especially that which goes beyond the expected trend. In addition, English (2021) suggested an increase in parents choosing to home educate their children is a result of their experience of home learning during Covid-19 lockdowns. However, conclusions drawn by English were based on population-level data and extrapolated from increases in state and territory totals rather than from parent voices. We seek to investigate what the current parent motivations to home educate are, and whether these have changed in recent years.

Therefore, the aim of our study is to investigate the changing landscape of home education in Australia. Study 1 will seek to obtain and provide national student registration numbers across the preceding five years, asking the research question: *Has the number of home education student registrations increased in Australia?* We will investigate the

reason for Australian families to enter home schooling across recent years, hence, Study 2 hypothesises that families entering home schooling after the beginning of Covid-19 would report different reasons for home schooling compared with families who entered home schooling beforehand. Study 3 will report on the *Modified Enrolment Motivations* questionnaire (Collom, 2005) with the aim to provide an updated measure using more recent research with validation of factors. This will also allow us to ask the research question, *what reasons load together to form categories/factors that describe what motivates parents to home school?*

Method

Participants

A sample of 203 home schooling educators, representing 373 home schooled children, was recruited from the Australian Christian Home Schooling (ACHS) enrolment database. ACHS provides support services specifically for home schooling families who are providing home education without the assistance of a centralised school. ACHS's database covers all states and territories of Australia and is not restricted by a common confounding issue, which is the non-registration with a state or territory education department. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics specific to respondents (see Appendix). Respondents were majority females ($n = 162$; 79.8%) and mothers ($n = 161$; 79.3%).

Descriptive information about the home schooling families was collected and is presented in Table 2 (see Appendix). Families were located across all Australian states and territories. We note the three main states being, New South Wales (31.03%), Victoria (27.58%) and Queensland (26.60%). Mothers represented the most frequent primary educator ($n = 183$; 90.15%), with most holding tertiary qualifications ($n = 123$; 60.59%); approximating similar samples of Australian home educators (Slater et al., 2022; Jackson, 2021). On average families had home schooled for over 2 years, however, some families had home schooled for up to 29 years (1 to 348 months; $M = 26.95$; $SD = 51.94$). Prior to home schooling more than half of families attended public or private schools (68%).

The number of school-aged children in each family ranged between 0 and 11 children ($M = 2.38$; $SD = 1.54$), and the number of school-aged children currently being home schooled in each family ranged from 0 to 7 children ($M = 1.85$; $SD = 1.16$). The design of the study was to assess original motivations for home schooling and therefore inclusion criteria allowed for recently withdrawn or completed families. It was the case, for example, that one family had recently completed their children's education and no longer had school-aged children at home. In total, eight families had withdrawn or completed home schooling at the time of the study. These family's original motivations for home schooling were valid and therefore they were retained in the study.

The start date of enrolment, along with prior education status, was used to categorise families by those who were home schooling pre- or post-2020, labelled *Enrolment Group*. Specifically, March 2020 was determined to be the cut-off date for a family that had not home schooled previously, to be assigned as post-2020. This date was based on the action

of the World Health Organisation and the Australian Government to notify the public of the pandemic and lockdowns, respectively (ABS, 2021). These events both occurred in March 2020. As any cut-off date would have been an arbitrary date, it was chosen to select the most conservative date to ensure any parents who were motivated early and quickly to home school due to any Covid-related factors would be captured in this cut-off date. One hundred and thirty-six respondents (67.00%) started home schooling in March 2020 or after and had not home schooled prior to this time at any other institution. Descriptive statistics analysed across this variable are reported in Table 3 (see Appendix).

Design

A between-groups quasi-experimental design was implemented utilising a non-randomised convenience sample. For Study 2, the dependent variable was enrolment motivations to home school, operationalised using the modified *Enrolment Motivations* questionnaire (Collom, 2005) and measured by the importance scores for each of the 23 reasons, and by the single most important reason selected. The independent variable was the family's entry into home schooling with two levels, either pre-2020 or post-2020.

Materials

Email was used to distribute the survey which contained a link to the questionnaire. The *Wufoo* online survey platform was used to administer and anonymously collect responses to the questionnaire. *IBM SPSS* was used to statistically analyse the data.

A modified version of the *Enrolment Motivations* questionnaire originally developed by Collom (2005) was used. The modifications included adding items from other scales, literature recommendations or contemporary culture perspectives. Items were added from the *Parent and Family Involvement Survey*, part of the *National Household Education Survey Program* which had been piloted and psychometrically assessed (United States Department of Education, 2019), for example, "I/we desire the opportunity to give our/my child(ren) moral instruction". Items related to themes identified by Lois (2017) were included, for example, "Home education is what God has called me to do" and "I/we are concerned about unhealthy peer relationships at other schools". Finally, items were included which were relevant to the Covid-19 context, but which could remain applicable beyond this context, such as, "I/we are concerned the other schools would not respect my/our parental choices". The scale was measured on a 5-point Likert-style scale where 1 = not at all important, 2 = somewhat important, 3 = neutral, 4 = important, 5 = very important.

Procedure

A desk audit of the home education student registrations within Australia from 2018 - 2022 was conducted to provide descriptive statistics for the research question: *Has the number of home education student registrations increased in Australia?* State and territory reports were accessed from the public domain where possible. In the case where student registration numbers were not officially reported, contact was made with appropriate state and territory representatives to obtain the official figures.

In addition, to investigate the research question regarding theoretical categories of motivations and the hypothesis regarding parent motivations, the survey was distributed to all families registered, or previously registered, with the Australian Christian Home Schooling organisation. Only one distribution round was conducted to ensure each family did not complete the questionnaire multiple times, however, follow-up was conducted via the organisation newsletter and online information.

Results

Study 1: Australian home schooling numbers across the past five years

Table 4 and Figure 1 provides the results of the desk audit conducted to obtain student registration numbers for each Australian state and territory from 2018 - 2022. The number of registered home school students nationwide between 2018 and 2022 increased by 110%. For the nationwide data, the largest single-year increase occurred between 2021 and 2022 with a 46.89% increase compared to yearly increases of 5.90% (2018/19), 16.90% (2019/20), and 15.22% (2020/21). A notable percentage increase is observed between 2018/19 and 2019/20 which remains somewhat consistent to 2020/21, meaning that an increase occurred in the year 2020 but without figures prior to 2018 it is difficult to identify a visual or percentage increase trend.

Table 4: Registered Australian home schooled students 2018-2022

State/ Territory	Year				
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Australian Capital Territory (a)	302	305	322	395	413
New South Wales (b)	5429	5906	7032	8993	12149
Northern Territory (c)	110	124	145	152	200
Queensland (d)	3232	3411	4297	5008	8461
South Australia (e)	1315	1360	1606	1795	2443
Tasmania (f)	976	1068	1160	1160	1303
Victoria (g)	5333	5562	6405	6836	11332
Western Australia (h)	3563	3720	4116	4562	6151
Total	20260	21456	25083	28901	42452
(a) Education Directorate (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022) (b) New South Wales Education Standards Authority (2022, 2024) (c) Anonymous, personal communication, 23/03/2023 (d) Department of Education (2023) (e) M. Price, personal communication, 23 February 2023 (f) Department of Education (2018, 2019, 2021, 2022) (g) Victorian Regulations and Qualifications Authority (2020, 2021, 2022) (h) Department of Education (2022)					

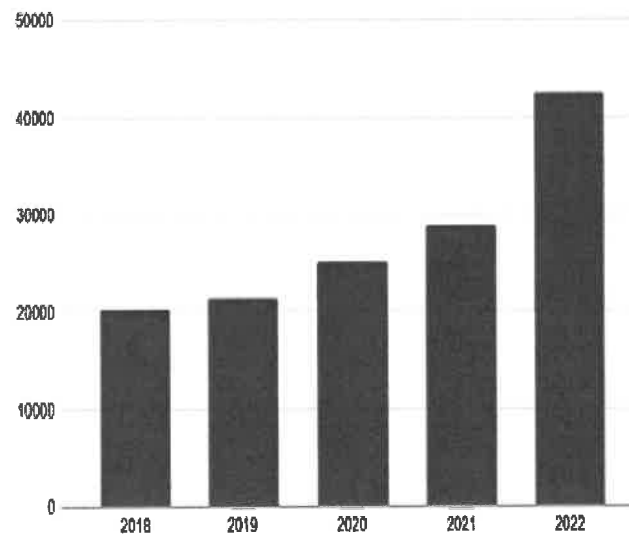


Figure 1: Total registered Australian home schooled students 2018-2022

As of 2022, the students registered for home schooling in Australia totalled 42,452 according to government records and data shown above. The ABS provides the total number of students registered with government and non-government schools as 4,042,512, not including home school registrations (ABS, 2023). Therefore, the home schooling registrations constitute 1.04% of the combined government, non-government and home schooling students registered in Australia.

Study 2: Parental motivations to home school pre- and post-COVID

To investigate whether discrete differences were observed between pre- and post-2020 enrolment groups across all the enrolment motivations assessed (i.e. each of the *Modified Enrolment Motivation* questionnaire items); 23 independent samples *t*-tests were conducted using a 1% level of significance which takes into consideration the increased family-wise error due to running multiple *t*-tests. It was determined that these discrete differences were of more value than the subscales provided by the factor analysis due to the nuanced, complex and specific motivations possibly related to the pandemic.

Levene's test for equality of variance was significant for two variables: *Moral instruction* and *Concerns for children's health*. The assumption of homogeneity of variance was unviolated for all other variables.

Concern about school absences was found to be significant across groups, $t(197) = -4.61$, $p < .001$, two-tailed. Families enrolled in home schooling post-2020 ($M = 3.53$; $SD = 1.44$) rated *Concern about school absences* as significantly more important than pre-2020 families ($M = 2.52$; $SD = 1.49$). The effect size was moderate to large, Cohen's $d = -0.70$.

Similarly, *Concerns for children's health* was significant, $t(197) = -2.68, p = .008$, two-tailed. Post-2020 families ($M = 2.49; SD = 1.51$) identified health concerns of their child/ren as a more important motivating factor to enrol in home schooling than pre-2020 families ($M = 1.92; SD = 1.33$). Cohen's d was -0.39 which is interpreted as a small effect size.

There were no significant differences found for any other motivating factors. Table 5 presents the results of all t -tests conducted (see Appendix).

Respondents were asked to identify the single most important reason for choosing to home school. Collapsed across enrolment groups, most respondents identified *Religious instruction* ($n = 52, 26.40\%$), *A calling from God* ($n = 27, 13.71\%$), *Concerns about curriculum at other schools* ($n = 19, 9.64\%$), and *Concerns about other school's adherence to parental choices* ($n = 15, 7.61\%$), as their top reasons for choosing to home school, representing 57.36% of respondents.

The four most frequent reasons to home school for pre-2020 enrolment families were *Religious instruction* ($n = 19$), *A calling from God* ($n = 13$), *Concerns about curriculum at other schools* ($n = 7$), and *A mistrust in the government to provide adequate education* ($n = 4$), compared to post-2020 enrolment families who identified *Religious instruction* ($n = 33$), *A calling from God* ($n = 14$), *Concerns about other school's adherence to parental choices* ($n = 13$) and *Concerns about curriculum at other schools* ($n = 12$), representing 68.25% and 53.73%, respectively, of respondents. See Table 6 for a full report of frequencies (see Appendix).

Chi-square tests for independence were conducted on all motivating reasons which contained cells (2×2 design) with frequencies greater than 5, and using a 5% level of significance (Pallant, 2020). The relation between parents motivated by *A calling from God* and *Enrolment group* approached significance, $X^2(1, N = 197) = 3.76, p = .052$, and could indicate there was a reduction in number of parents who identified a calling from God as being their most important reason for starting home schooling.

Tests for remaining assessable motivations which included, *Curriculum at other schools* and *Religious instruction* were non-significant (*Curriculum*: $X^2(1, N = 197) = 0.23, p = .633$; *Religious instruction*: $X^2(1, N = 197) = 0.66, p = .411$).

Study 3: Reliability and validity of the Modified Enrolment Motivations questionnaire

To investigate the theoretical categories of parental motivations to home educate, the *Modified Enrolment Motivations* questionnaire was developed and tested using reliability analysis and factor analysis.

Reliability analysis was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. To test the construct validity of the questionnaire items confirmatory factor analysis was conducted. Items were subjected to principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation, assessed by the rotated matrix (Pallant, 2020). Table 7 provides the survey wording, and factor analysis results (see Appendix). The factor loadings revealed items loaded on to five factors solution which

was supported by eigenvalues greater than 1 (Pallant, 2020). The first factor which was referred to as *Children's needs* (factor 1, Cronbach's alpha = .80); a second factor related to *Dissatisfaction with other schools and government* (factor 2, Cronbach's alpha = .82); a third factor referred to as *Family lifestyle* including items related to religious instruction and family connection (factor 3, Cronbach's alpha = .80); a fourth factor referred to as *Ideological reasons* (factor 4, Cronbach's alpha = .77); and a final factor referred to as *Attracted to curriculum and support provider* (factor 5, Cronbach's alpha = .75).

Discussion

The present research investigated the current landscape of home education in Australia seeking to understand the perceived growth in the number of home schooled students in Australia and the motivations of parents to choose home schooling, containing three unique but connected studies. To answer the research question *Has the number of home education student registrations increased in Australia?* a desk audit was conducted for all Australian states and territories finding that at 2022 there were 42,452 home school student registrations with a 110% increase since 2018. Changes in parental motivations to home school were tested pre and post-Covid as it was hypothesised there would be changes to parent motivations after Covid-19 began which was supported for the items of *Concerns about school absence* and *Concerns about children's health*, which had both increased post-Covid. Finally, to answer the research question *What are the categories of parent motivations to home educate their children?*, the *Modified Enrolment Motivations* questionnaire (Collom, 2005), was validated and factor analysis showed the questionnaire produced a five category solution identified as (i) children's needs; (ii) dissatisfaction with other schools and government; (iii) family lifestyle, including religious reasons; (iv) ideological reasons; and (v) attraction to home school curriculum or support provider.

Study 1 aimed to identify a national figure for home education registration. This had been attempted recently but was limited to only some of the Australian states and territories (English, 2021). Until the present study, a total number of Australian home education registrations had not been publicly released to our knowledge, further, it had not been described within industry groups since 2019 (Jackson, 2019). Our results identify the total number of students registered as home schooling within Australia as of 2022 as 42,452, an increase of 110% since 2018 and an increase of 46.9% to the previous 12 months. It should be noted that these figures do not account for the children completing home education who are not registered with government authorities. A recent Australian study conducted pre-Covid found 14.5% of home educated children were not registered (Slater et al., 2022). While a national figure is difficult to estimate it is likely to be significantly larger than the known registrations of 42,452 based on school-aged population estimates, academic literature, anecdotal reports and industry speculation.

The national total for students registered in government and non-government schools across Australia in 2022 was 4,042,512 (ABS, 2023), therefore, the total number of registered home schooling students equates to a little over 1% of the total registered students in Australia. This is somewhat less than the 6-7% of school-aged children home

schooling in the United States (Ray, 2024). However, when comparing the rate of increase there is a notable differentiation within the Australian schooling landscape. The ABS has surveyed the school-based student registrations reporting government school enrolment numbers between 2021 and 2022 have fallen by 0.6% and non-government school enrolments have risen by 2% (ABS, 2023), comparatively, this current study found that home school registrations in Australia increased by almost 50%. We suggest that home education is an increasing choice for parents and represents a significant area of recent growth across the Australian educational landscape. It is possible that the small percentage that home education registrations constitute in the total may make it difficult for government or schools to perceive the rise of parents choosing to home school. However, these figures should not be ignored as home education seems to be the fastest growing mode of schooling within Australia at this time.

Taken together, it can be confirmed that the growth trend of home education within Australia has been exponential compared to other schooling choices. The striking comparison in percentage increase between the two modes (school-based and home education), across the past 12 months, is an interesting indicator of a changing landscape. This finding provides a degree of importance to the following results as it is expected that education providers, government and academics will naturally ask the question – what is motivating these families to choose home education? Our Study 2 goes some way to answer this question as it investigated the motivations of parents to home educate in Australia before and after Covid-19.

We sought to investigate whether there was a perceivable change in parental motivations to home educate, comparing before and after the beginning of Covid-19 and the pandemic. Of the 23 reasons identified in the *Modified Enrolment Motivations* questionnaire, two were found to change before and after the beginning of the pandemic. It was identified that concerns about school absence was a greater motivator to enrol in home education after Covid. It is not possible to distinguish whether this concern was to do with the absence specifically related to lockdowns, quarantine requirements, increased sickness or factors not related to the pandemic or the national response. However, it is possible to say that parents expect students to attend school as often as possible and disruption to their ability to attend causes concern and increases a leaning towards home education. It should be noted that this response would only likely be selected by families who came from school-based education to choosing home schooling. Since our data suggests 32% of respondents' primary choice for schooling was home schooling, this demographic information increases the statistical interest of our result.

Quantitatively, there is an established link between school absence and the choice to home educate which has also been linked to parents' dissatisfaction with schools (Green-Hennesy & Mariotti, 2023). It might be that absence from school is a consequence of a variety of known parental concerns such as their child's social and emotional well-being or developmental differences (Slater et al., 2022). The number of days absent from school, often written on school report cards, is an easier decision metric than an intangible construct such as well-being. Hence, it may be that while absence is not a primary concern for parents, explaining the lack of qualitative evidence in the literature (Slater et al, 2022),

it is easily measurable, and a common outcome across a variety of families with children having difficulties at school, thus it becomes an obvious and tangible concern. In the least, the evidence suggests that increased school absence is a likely predictor of school withdrawal and further research should be undertaken to confirm the connection between these factors and the choice to home educate.

Another significant change to motivations pre and post-Covid-19 was that parents were more concerned about the health of their child/ren after Covid. This item was distinct from special learning needs or health and safety within schools, as these were measured in other items, but were not found to be different across time. It is possible that the item asking about concerns for the health of the children was used as a catch-all for the health issues that the pandemic raised for society. As the pandemic was a health concern at a societal and global level, it is possible that this created an overall increase in salience of health in our sample. If attending school increased a child's risk of being exposed to sickness, then home education would be perceived as preferable. From our findings, we can conclude that the health and welfare of children is a prime concern for parents and where a mode of learning impinges on the child's health, parents are motivated to move to a home education model.

Both findings (school absence and child health) may indicate that school choice has become more child-centred compared to the earlier work done by Van Galen (1988) in which parent motivations were largely structured around parent philosophy or ideals. The previous research literature lacks an investigation of this hypothesis, but it is supported by the changes to categorisation found by Wang et al. (2019), Valiente et al. (2022) and Slater et al. (2022) in which child needs became disassociated from the overall family or parent needs. More work could be conducted to consider the changing motivations of parents to home educate based on a child-centric model. It would equally be of interest to retest parent motivations in the years to come to see if our results are consistent beyond the Covid-19 period. This would confirm whether our results are based on Covid-specific factors or if these results pick up on a broader change of attitudes towards school choice.

When asked about the single most important reason to choose home schooling we found the two most frequent responses aligned with the religious values of the parents and constituted 40.1% of the sample. This is in contrast to a recent study by Slater et al. (2022) who found religious reasons were 7.8% of their Australian sample. Given that ACHS provides a curriculum that includes Biblical instruction it is likely that this sample is skewed towards Christian values. However, it is also possible that the measurement design contributed to this finding. Slater et al. conducted qualitative research to assess the motivations of parents to home school and did not use a validated survey developed by theory or psychometric analysis. As is known, some constructs remain undetected when using open-ended questioning but can be exposed using direct and specific measures such as questionnaires (El-Den et al., 2020). Speigler (2010) has noted the changing nature of *Religious reasons* and posited that this was to do with methodological influences, specifically qualitative versus quantitative designs. However, it is also true that questionnaires are designed to detect and measure latent constructs (Boeteng et al., 2018; El-Den et al., 2020). It is possible that family values, specifically religious beliefs, include latent or

somewhat obscure motivators, not identified in qualitative designs. Therefore, when asked using a structured measure, such as in the present study, these motivators were exposed as widespread and consistent across the sample. The use of the Modified Enrolment Motivations questionnaire should be extended to test a wider sample of home schooling families, to confirm the significance of this finding and the hypothesis that religious beliefs or family values are latent constructs.

A review of the theoretical categories of parental motivations with a consideration of the current societal, educational and political climate necessitated an investigation into the overall categories of motivations within Australia at this time. Using the *Enrolment Motivations* questionnaire developed and validated by Collom (2005) we modernised the measure using current research and theory development. As the questionnaire was modified and some items had not been psychometrically tested, factor analysis and reliability analysis were conducted which provided similar factor results to Collom, and improved reliability. Where Collom found four factors, our results contained five factors, due to a differentiation of family and child needs into two separate factors which was expected based on the literature review and is consistent with *a priori* expectations. The factor loading from the present study suggested categories that aligned to (i) children's needs; (ii) dissatisfaction with other schools and government; (iii) family lifestyle needs (including religious reasons); (iv) ideological reasons; and (v) attraction to home school curriculum or support provider. Collom's (2005) original categories were (i) criticism of public schools; (ii) being attracted to a home schooling organisation; (iii) ideological reasons (including religious reasons); and (iv) family needs.

Similar to the discussion above, our results confirm, using quantitative data, the additional category of parent motivation – child needs. This may indicate that there has been a broader shift of parents to view their role with a stronger child-centric position. Slater et al. (2022) identified qualitatively that parents are now also motivated by their child's needs, as did a review by Valiente et al. (2022). However, neither of these studies was able to offer a quantitative indication of this shift based on psychometric data. It seems that categories of motivation to home school still retain commonly expected motivations such as dissatisfaction with schools, family needs and ideological reasons, but significantly now also include motivations specifically aligned to the needs of the child. These needs may include developmental, educational, emotional, social or psychological needs which are better met either in a home environment or in a one-on-one pedagogy.

In addition, we note that the factor loading for the item related to religious reasons, *I/we desire to give my/our child/ren religious instruction*, changed from the initial results of Collom (2005) compared to the current study. This item was not modified in the current study and remain the same wording as Collom's questionnaire. However, in Collom's results religious reasons loaded onto ideological reasons, whereas in the current study it loaded onto family lifestyle needs. These results may indicate that religious reasons have become a family values concern rather than a social or ideological issue. As discussed above, the issue of how religion influences or correlates with home schooling choice is an area of future research that deserves specific attention.

Apart from investigating a new categorisation of parental motivations to home educate, the present study also provided a new questionnaire modified to include the recent development of theory and practice in this sector. Our questionnaire has been psychometrically assessed and shows good support for validity and reliability using a relatively large sample size and a diverse range of families including those who may have and may not have registered with government authorities. This feature provides stronger validation as it allows for philosophical or political motivations to be represented, thus providing a broader and more representative sample.

A strength, as well as a weakness of this study, was the sample. It was a convenience sample that utilised what some may consider a niche group of home education families. It is likely that families who are attracted to ACHS will align with, or at least be open to, Christian values. While this does not delimit our sample, it is a feature that may make some results, such as religious reasons, stronger than it may necessarily be. We have noted this limitation. However, because ACHS does not require, though it does promote, government registration, this sample is able to include respondents who are often difficult to sample as they do not appear on government registration lists and are tentative towards responding to researchers aligned with government authorities. It should be a consideration of researchers to sample these respondents, and any results that do not include this subsample will lack vital data.

Finally, we acknowledge that a cut-off time for the post-Covid group was difficult to discern and any difference to this cut-off date may have altered the results presented. We chose to take the most conservative date to ensure any influences related to Covid and the pandemic were included.

Conclusion

This study has provided evidence in support of the exponential growth of home schooling in Australia which is approaching growth rates seen in other countries (Ray, 2024), and it is a growth rate that is far beyond that seen in all other education modalities within Australia. Home education is not a choice that suits all families or students, and it will not be a major contender given the current familial structure and societal pressure for parents to join the full-time workforce. Thus, any growth in this sector is of keen interest across a broad range of observers, consumers, and providers. School absences and the health of children are critical motivators in the decision matrix of modern families, but issues of religious values and the unique needs of the child are also having an impact in less tangible ways. Still, these reasons cannot be assumed to account for the exponential growth and more work is required to untangle the interconnected motivations changing the landscape of home schooling in Australia.

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Appendix: Tables 1 - 3 and 5 - 7

Table 1: Demographics of respondents (N=203)

Demographic		<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Female	162	79.80
	Male	39	19.20
	Missing	2	
Relationship to child/ren	Mother	161	79.31
	Father	40	19.70
	Grandparent	2	0.99
	Other	0	0.00
	Missing	0	

Table 2: Demographics of home schooling families (N=203)

Demographic		<i>n</i>	%
State	Australian Capital Territory	2	0.99
	New South Wales	63	31.03
	Northern Territory	1	0.49
	Queensland	54	26.60
	South Australia	13	6.40
	Tasmania	1	0.49
	Victoria	56	27.58
	Western Australia	11	5.42
	Missing	2	
Primary educator	Mother	183	90.15
	Father	18	8.90
	Grandparent	0	0.00
	Tutor	0	0.00
	Missing	2	
Educational attainment of primary educator	Some high school	16	7.88
	High school graduate	49	24.14
	Trade or vocational degree	53	26.11
	Bachelor degree	47	23.15
	Professional degree	23	11.33
	Missing	15	
Prior education status (a)	Too young to attend school	30	14.78
	Attended public school	83	40.89
	Attended private school	55	27.09
	Home schooled with another service	11	5.42
	Home schooled independently	11	5.42
	Other	10	4.93
	Missing	3	
Number of P-12 children in family	0	1	0.49
	1	53	26.11
	2	79	38.92
	3	35	17.24

	4	16	7.88
	5	6	2.96
	6	2	0.99
	7	2	0.99
	8	2	0.99
	9	1	0.49
	10	0	0.00
	11	1	0.49
	Missing	5	
Number of children currently home schooled	0	7	3.45
	1	88	43.35
	2	64	31.53
	3	25	12.32
	4	12	5.91
	5	4	1.97
	6	0	0.00
	7	2	0.99
	Missing	1	

Note. (a) Education status prior to enrolling with ACHS

Table 3: Descriptive statistics by enrolment group

	Enrolment group	Pre-2020		Post-2020	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
	Total (a)	64	31.53	136	67.00
Gender of respondent	Female	49	24.13	111	54.68
	Male	14	6.89	24	11.82
Primary educator	Mother	56	27.59	124	61.08
	Father	7	3.45	11	5.42
Educational attainment of primary educator	Some high school	1	0.49	15	7.39
	High school graduate	17	8.37	31	15.27
	Trade or vocational degree	21	10.34	31	15.27
	Bachelor degree	13	6.40	34	16.75
	Professional degree	10	4.93	13	6.40
State	Australian Capital Territory	0	0.00	2	0.99
	New South Wales	21	10.34	41	20.20
	Northern Territory	0	0.00	1	0.49
	Queensland	20	9.85	34	16.75
	South Australia	5	24.63	8	39.41
	Tasmania	0	0.00	1	0.49
	Victoria	17	8.37	38	18.72
	Western Australia	1	0.49	10	4.93
Average no. months enrolled with ACHS		66.25	80.15	8.83	7.70
Average no. P-12 children in family		2.65	-	2.32	-
Average no. children currently being home schooled		2.00	-	1.83	-

Note. (a) No. missing = 3

Table 5: Results of t-tests comparing pre and post enrolment groups by motivating reasons

Enrolment motivations		Pre-2020		Post-2020		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
1. Quality of teaching at other schools		4.39	0.85	4.28	0.99	0.78	198	.438
2. Curriculum at other schools		4.63	0.77	4.59	0.86	0.32	197	.752
3. Assessments at other schools are inappropriate		3.61	1.09	3.65	1.02	-0.27	197	.789
4. Mistrust government - education		4.25	1.01	4.31	0.99	-0.39	198	.698
5. Mistrust government - health and safety		4.14	1.11	4.13	1.16	0.05	195	.961
6. Other schools would not respect parental choices		4.36	4.01	4.39	1.13	-.018	198	.855
7. Home schooling resources and support		4.52	0.69	4.52	0.72	-1.29	198	.952
8. Home schooling curriculum		4.27	0.88	4.43	0.79	-1.29	198	.198
9. Creation science		4.42	0.96	4.55	0.82	-0.99	198	.326
10. Religious instruction		4.83	0.68	4.75	0.69	0.72	197	.471
11. Moral instruction		4.89	0.44	4.79	0.22	1.26	197	.210
12. Parent availability		4.45	0.78	4.61	0.79	0.61	198	.546
13. Family connection		4.55	0.78	4.61	0.79	-0.53	198	.595
14. Education - not government responsibility		6.77	1.24	3.75	1.11	0.11	196	.912
15. A calling from God		4.33	1.01	4.18	1.05	0.96	198	.337
16. Home schooling philosophy		3.64	1.29	3.60	1.14	0.25	198	.803
17. Inflexible scheduling		3.00	1.50	3.29	1.34	-1.35	197	.178
18. School absences		2.52	1.49	3.53	1.44	-4.61	197	<.001
19. Concerns for children's health		1.92	1.33	2.49	1.51	-2.68	197	.008
20. Learning needs		2.22	1.52	2.53	1.56	-1.34	197	.181
21. Unique abilities		2.73	1.51	3.07	1.48	-1.47	197	.144
22. Difficult experience at school		2.56	1.61	3.10	1.62	-2.19	195	.030
23. Unhealthy peer relationships		4.27	0.98	4.01	1.23	1.47	195	.143

Table 6: Frequencies by most important reason to home school and enrolment group

Enrolment group	Pre-2020 important		Post-2020 important		Total important
	<i>n</i>	% (a)	<i>n</i>	% (a)	<i>n</i>
Quality of teaching at other schools	1	1.59	4	2.99	5
Curriculum at other schools	7	11.11	12	8.96	19
Assessments at other schools are inappropriate	0	0.00	0	0.00	0
Mistrust government - education	4	6.35	10	7.46	14
Mistrust government - health and safety	3	4.76	8	5.97	11

Other schools would not respect parental choices	2	3.17	13	9.70	15
Home schooling resources and support	0	0.00	0	0.00	0
Home schooling curriculum	0	0.00	3	2.24	3
Creation science	0	0.00	1	0.75	1
Religious instruction	19	30.16	33	24.63	52
Moral instruction	3	4.76	6	4.48	9
Parent availability	1	1.59	0	0.00	1
Family connection	1	1.59	2	1.49	3
Education is not the government's responsibility	0	0.00	2	1.49	2
A calling from God	13	20.63	14	10.45	27
Home schooling philosophy	1	1.59	0	0.00	1
Inflexible scheduling	1	1.59	0	0.00	1
School absences	0	0.00	4	2.99	4
Health concerns	0	0.00	2	1.49	2
Learning needs	3	4.76	4	2.99	7
Unique abilities	0	0.00	3	2.24	3
Difficult experience at school	2	3.17	8	5.97	10
Unhealthy peer relationships	2	3.17	5	3.73	7
Total	63		134		197

Note. (a) Percentage is calculated for each Enrolment Group to highlight group differences regardless of group size.

Table 7: Factor loadings from principal components factor analysis (rotated matrix)

Enrolment motivation items	Factor				
	1	2	3	4	5
I/we are concerned about the quality of teaching at other schools	.08	.73	.07	.10	.24
I/we are concerned about the curriculum at other schools	-.06	.69	.28	-.01	.18
The assessment at other schools is inappropriate	.33	.59	-.09	.27	.11
I/we do not trust the government to provide an adequate education	.05	.76	.02	.32	-.12
I/we do not trust the government to provide adequate health and safety	.16	.71	.10	.15	.13
I/we are concerned the other schools would not respect my/our parental choices	.03	.70	.37	-.01	-.14
ACHS offers resources and support for home schoolers	.02	.02	.24	.04	.86
ACHS's educational program is of superior quality	.15	.23	.28	.08	.71
I/we desire the opportunity to give our/my child(ren) religious instruction	-.17	.15	.80	.19	.12
I/we desire the opportunity to give our/my child(ren) moral instruction	-.12	.18	.83	.08	.12

I am at home during the day and want to provide guidance and education	.24	.08	.58	.31	.32
I/we want to foster greater family connection	.02	.08	.76	.17	.19
ACHS's strength and focus on creation science education	.00	.11	.48	.49	.32
It is not the government's responsibility to provide education	-.01	.25	.19	.82	-.05
Home education is what God has called me to do	.06	.15	.42	.65	.09
I have always believed in the philosophy of home schooling	.16	.24	.11	.56	.44
The scheduling of other schools is too inflexible for my family	.61	.10	.10	.38	-.05
I/we are concerned about school absences	.53	.26	.35	.07	-.08
My child(ren) have health concerns	.77	.17	-.06	-.02	.09
My child(ren) have special learning needs	.77	-.05	-.12	.03	.08
My child(ren) have unique abilities	.75	-.07	-.11	.16	.04
My child had a difficult experience at his or her previous school	.76	.15	.01	-.26	.10
I/we are concerned about unhealthy peer relationships at other schools	.32	.25	.30	.01	.16

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