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REPORT

NATIONAL RESEARCH ON HOME EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Foreword by Prof Rachael Jesika Singh

Home education in South Africa is legislated both by the Constitution of the country and the Schools Act of 1996. This legislation provides an opportunity for parents to exercise a further option in terms of education for their children. One of the major challenges of home education is the availability of data on home education because the only available data are from sources where formal home schooling is registered. Since home education is presented in different formats, collective data are vague. However, it is known through collected empirical data that over the last 20 years, there has been an increase in the number of children who follow the home education route in South Africa.

The two primary providers of formal basic education are private and public schools. Private schools are expensive and remain out of reach of most South Africans. Public schools, on the other hand, face challenges such as funding cuts, poor maintenance of infrastructure, and declining quality of provision. These factors push more and more parents towards other options such as home education. Movements such as home schooling and unschooling are gaining momentum. This report presents quantitative data gathered on home education in South Africa. Although it represents a small sample (600 respondents), it still points to important statistics on home education in South Africa. Where data are vague and absent, this report represents a start to record statistics on home education in South Africa.

Through data collection on gender, age, province, qualification, language of the household, income, employment status, number of children, assessment, and other factors, such as employment and marital status, this report presents a glance at the trends for both parents and children engaged in home education. The report will contribute to greater awareness of home education in South Africa, and the Learning Society Institute must be commended for compiling statistics on home education. It also paves the way for further research and future reports that are qualitative in nature and where depth in data are qualified through personal experiences and the accounts of participants in home education.

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1 Introduction

Home education is the umbrella term for all home-based learning where parents take primary responsibility for their school-going aged children's formal and informal education outside a school or any other external institutional environment. In South Africa, home education was illegal during the apartheid era, but after 1994, both the Constitution and the Schools Act of 1996, in alignment with Article 26 (3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, legalised home education. The number of families choosing to home educate their children has steadily grown over the last three decades of democracy from only 50 recorded in 1996 to over a 100 000, a conservative estimate, in 2017. The number rose dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic to over 300 000 by 2022. These figures remain under scrutiny as it does not include the parents who choose not to join any forums and those who home educate 'under the radar' for fear of possible negative government response.

Due to the rise of the number of people home educating in South Africa and the scant research data available on this cohort, it became imperative to undertake a national survey of home education to gain relevant information to understand this phenomenon.

Home educators are generally seen as an elusive group of people, and the review of the Basic Education Laws Amendment Bill, generally known as the BELA Bill, during the time of the questionnaire added to the apprehension of home educators participating in the research.

This report focuses on the quantitative data strand of the research to give broad insight into the sociodemographic characteristics of the home education community in South Africa. It also includes some of the main reasons parents opted for home education and a note on assessment for a deeper understanding. Other qualitative data collated are currently being used together with the quantitative data in future research publications.

2 Procedure

A comprehensive questionnaire (available on Google Forms) that included both quantitative and qualitative strands of data and covered a wide range of issues pertinent to home education, such as reasons for choosing home education, approaches, assessment, and personal reflections, was sent to potential respondents. The questionnaire was first sent out to five respondents known to the researcher, and after tweaking the questionnaire based on

the feedback from the five respondents, it was sent out to the broader home education community. It was necessary to use the snowball purposive sampling technique to reach out to the many home educators in South Africa. The researcher sent the questionnaire (a link to a Google Form) to families on her current data base with a request for the recipients to share the link with people in their networks and on their social media platforms. This created a snowball effect and over a considerable period (a year and 4 months), 600 responses were collated from home educating families in all nine provinces of South Africa.

3 Reasons for home education

In general, the home education community can be split into the following two groups:

1. Idealogues: Families who choose to home educate to fit their life philosophy and/or worldview; and
2. Pedagogues: Families who choose to home educate whose primary concern is the development of their child, and who believe the schools are unable to meet their child's developmental needs because of socio-emotional or academic reasons.

The questionnaire provided a range of options, and respondents could choose the reasons they chose home education. The responses from this study confirmed that home educators fall into the above two groups. Some of the main reasons parents choose home education are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Reasons for choosing home education

Description	Number	Percentage
Religious	226	37.7
General life values/philosophy not based on religion	311	51.8
COVID-19 pandemic	115	19.2
Financial	170	28.3
Individual learning needs (learning difficulties or advanced learner)	274	45.7
Social issues at school	170	28.3
Health	52	8.7
Proximity of available schools	82	13.7
Need for flexibility due to work/travel/sport	109	18.2
School is not a safe and nurturing environment for children's optimal development	329	54.8

Respondents could choose more than one option in this question. Most respondents fell into the category of idealogues because 51.8% chose the reason 'general life values/philosophy not based on religion' and 37.7% chose 'religious' as reason for their choice. It is important to

note that many parents believe that schools are not safe and do not meet their child's learning needs. In terms of proximity of available suitable schools, respondents cited distance, language, poor infrastructure, class sizes, and curriculum as reasons for not attending. Some responses showed that the choice of curriculum, poor education quality and results, extreme bullying, pending emigration, and lack of international accreditation of the CAPS curriculum are further barriers for attending school. In terms of financial reasons, some stated that the cost of private schooling was outside their income bracket, and home education was a better option than public schooling. In terms of health, some parents mentioned their children experienced extreme anxiety over and above health issues like attention deficit disorder, autism, and other specific health issues of the child.

Respondents also gave the following additional reasons:

- The CAPS curriculum is inadequate, outdated, and unsuitable;
- Poor teaching standards;
- Large class sizes not conducive for learning—one size fits all models;
- Language of learning at the school;
- Poor infrastructure of schools;
- Poor hygiene, especially toilets;
- Boredom at school;
- Academic focus is too intense and overwhelming;
- The school day is too long—hours at school and homework;
- Children do not have time to play and enjoy childhood; and
- The education system is failing children.

The responses made it clear that parents have a wide range of reasons for choosing to home educate their children. Their main focus is the well-being and optimal development of their children, which they believe the schools cannot meet.

4 Results of the quantitative data collated from the questionnaire

4.1 Gender of respondents

This was a compulsory question, and therefore, received 600 responses. Most respondents were female, and the responses denoted that in general, mothers have taken on the primary role in home educating their children. Figure 1 and Table 2 show the gender of the respondents.

Figure 1 Gender of respondents

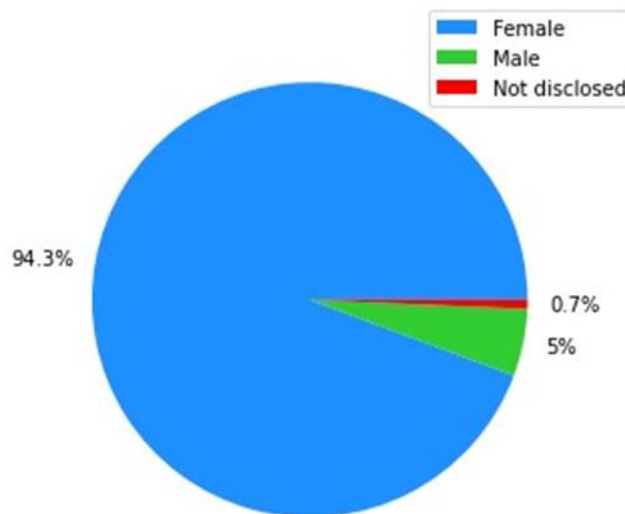


Table 2 Gender of respondents

Description	Number	Percentage
Female	566	94.3
Male	30	5
Prefer not to disclose	4	0.7

4.2 Age of respondents

Figure 2 and Table 3 show that 88 out of 600 respondents were under the age of 35, and therefore, it can be concluded that most respondents fall in the mature adult category.

Figure 2 Age of respondents

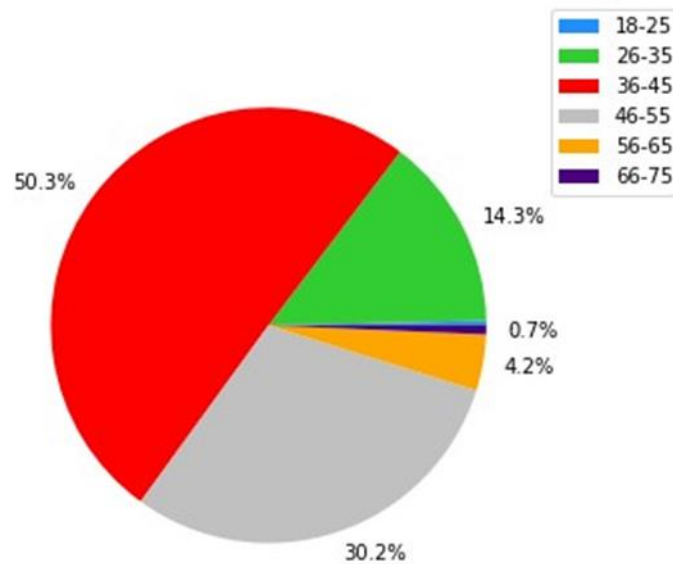


Table 3 Age of respondents

Description in years	Number	Percentage
18-25	2	0.3
26-35	86	14.3
36-45	302	50.3
46-55	181	30.2
56-65	25	4.2
66-75	4	0.7

4.3 How would you describe yourself?

This was a compulsory question, but there was an option for those who preferred not to disclose their racial identity. It was necessary to understand the racial identities of the people home educating. It must be noted that the term Coloured in South Africa denotes a racial classification under the apartheid system that continues to be used for research purposes to understand the developmental trends in South African society on various levels. Although Figure 3 and Table 4 show that the number of people describing themselves as White was the majority (68.3%), the numbers also show a significant number of people home educating who are not in the White category. This dents the stereotype that home education is only done by White people in South Africa.

Figure 3 How would you describe yourself?

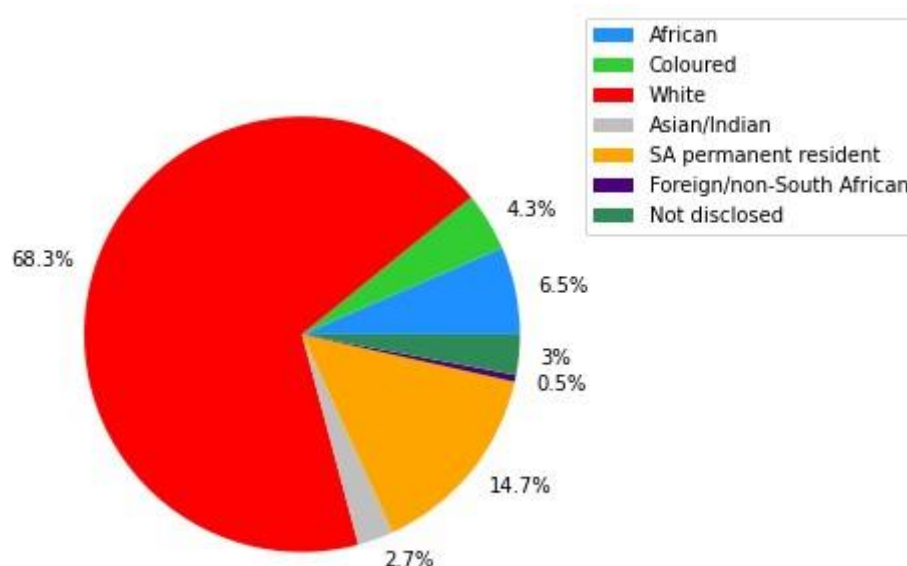


Table 4 How would you describe yourself?

Description	Number	Percentage
African	39	6.5
Coloured	26	4.3
White	410	68.3
Asian/Indian	16	2.7
SA permanent resident	88	14.7
Foreign/non-South African	3	0.5
Do not want to disclose	18	3

4.4 Which province do you reside in?

This was a compulsory question, and Figure 4 and Table 5 show that although home education has a presence in all nine provinces, most home educators reside in Gauteng and the Western Cape, the two wealthiest provinces in the country.

Figure 4 Which province do you reside in?

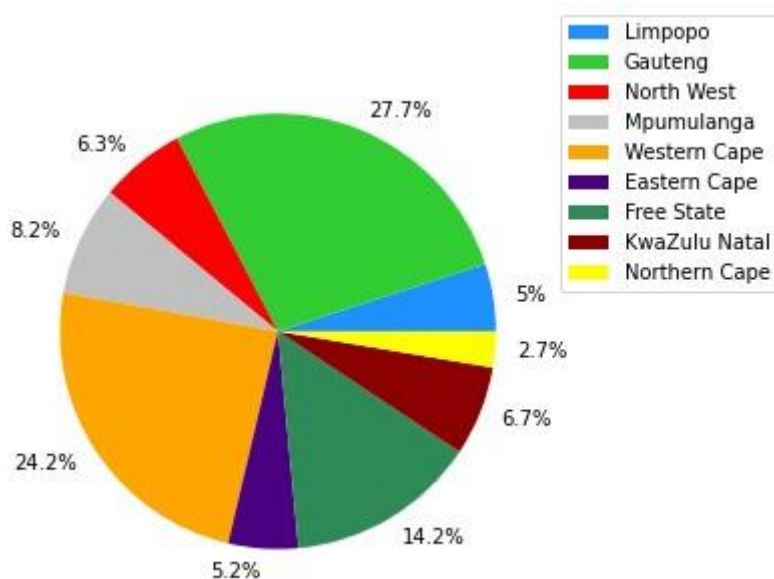


Table 5 Which province do you reside in?

Description	Number	Percentage
Limpopo	30	5
Gauteng	166	27.7
North West	38	6.3
Mpumalanga	49	8.2
Western Cape	145	24.2
Eastern Cape	31	5.2
Free State	85	14.2
KwaZulu Natal	40	6.7
Northern Cape	16	2.7

4.5 Highest qualification

It is necessary to understand the education level of at least one parent in the home educating family. The results in Figure 5 and Table 6 show that 16.8% of the respondents do not have any tertiary education qualification. This denotes that most respondents are well educated and may indicate some level of confidence and self-efficacy to home educate their children.

Figure 5 Highest qualification

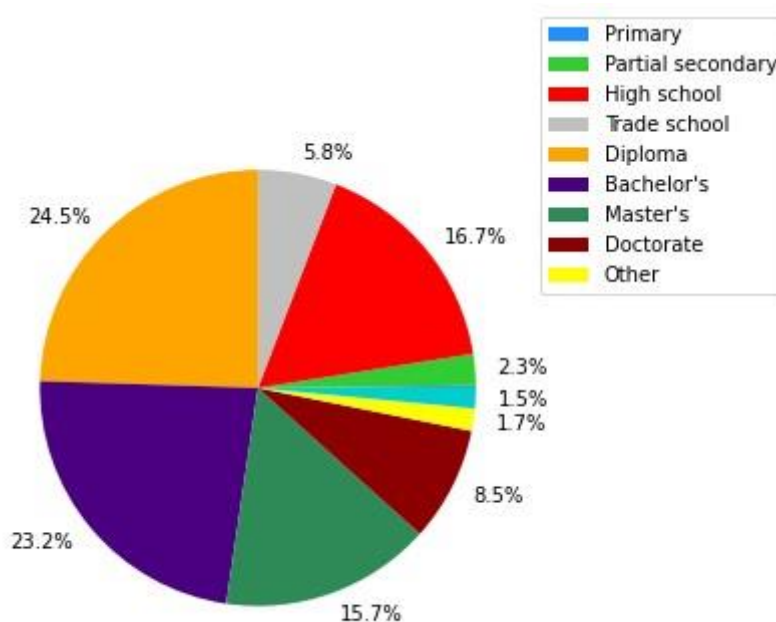


Table 6 Highest qualification

Description	Number	Percentage
No schooling completed	0	0
Primary (completed 7 years of school)	1	0.1
Partial Secondary (completed 8–11 years of school)	14	2.3
High/secondary completed	100	16.7
Certified trade/technical/vocational training	35	5.8
Diploma	147	24.5
Bachelor's degree	139	23.2
Honours degree	94	15.7
Master's degree	51	8.5
Doctoral degree	10	1.7
Other	9	1.5

4.6 Marital status

This was a compulsory question, and Figure 6 and Table 7 show that most respondents have a domestic partnership arrangement. This denotes that the characteristic support prevalent in a two-parent household makes home education a more viable option for this cohort.

Figure 6 Marital status

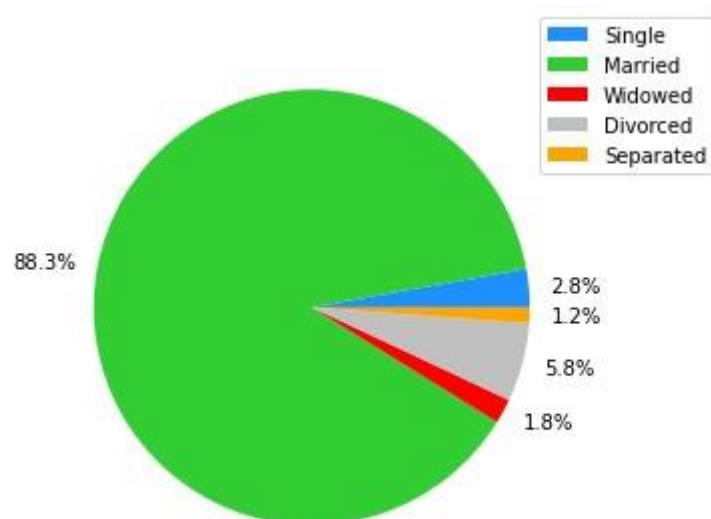


Table 7 Marital status

Description	Number	Percentage
Single (never married)	17	2.8
Married/domestic partnership	530	88.3
Widowed	11	1.8
Divorced	35	5.8
Separated	7	1.2

4.7 Employment status

Home education is generally defined as being a parent-led and/or child-led activity, and it stands to reason that at least one parent spends a significant amount of time at home. The results in Figure 7 and Table 8 does show that at least 85.4% of the respondents are able to make themselves available for their children on a day-to-day basis. This figure is drawn from all the descriptions in Table 8 except 'employed full time (40 or more hours per week outside the home)' and 'employed part-time (up to 39 hours per week outside the home)'.

Figure 7 Employment status

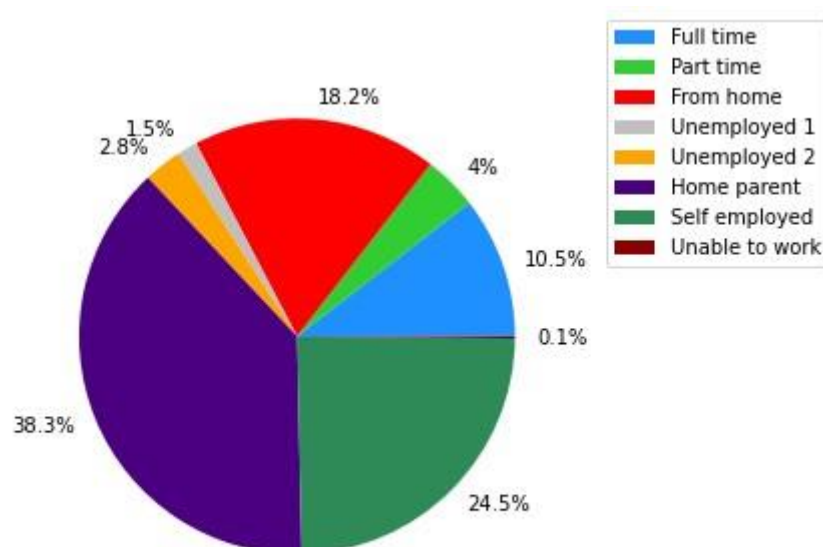


Table 8 Employment status

Description	Number	Percentage
Employed full time (40 or more hours per week outside the home)	63	10.5
Employed part-time (up to 39 hours per week outside the home)	24	4
Work from home	109	18.2
Unemployed and currently looking for work	9	1.5
Unemployed and not currently looking for work	17	2.8
Home-based parent	230	38.3
Self-employed	147	24.5
Unable to work	1	0.1

4.8 Total annual household income

Although it was important to provide a variety of options to both respect and help respondents feel comfortable in providing information, it was unfortunate that most respondents chose the decline/confidential option in this question.

Figure 8 Compulsory question: 600 responses

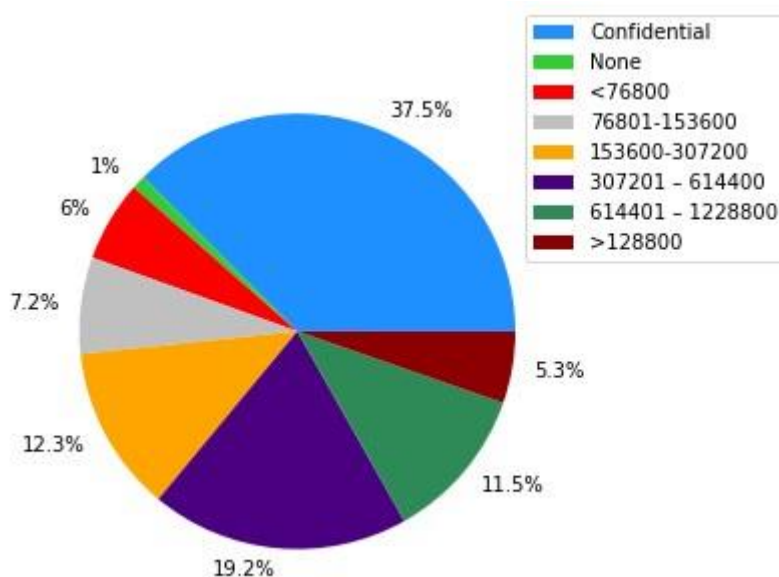


Table 9

Description	Number	Percentage
Decline/Confidential	225	37.5
None	6	1
76 800 or less	36	6
76 801–153 600	43	7.2
153 601–307 200	74	12.3
307 201–614 400	115	19.2
614 401–1 228 800	69	11.5
128 800 or more	32	5.3

4.9 Home language

Figure 9 and Table 10 show that in keeping with the results in Section 4.3, English and Afrikaans are the majority home languages in the home education community.

Figure 9 Home language

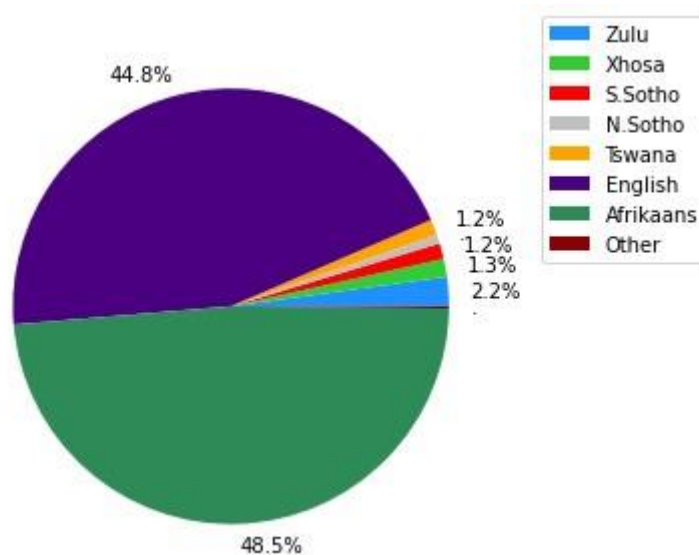


Table 10 Home language

Description	Number	Percentage
Zulu	13	2.2
Xhosa	8	1.3
Southern Sotho	7	1.2
Northern Sotho	4	0.7
Tswana	7	1.2
Venda	0	0
Tsonga	0	0
Swati	0	0
Ndebele	0	0
English	269	44.8
Afrikaans	291	48.5
Other	1	0.2

4.10 Number of children

Figure 10 and Table 11 show that most respondents (44.8%) had two children, and that this was followed by respondents with three children (26.3%).

Figure 10 Number of children

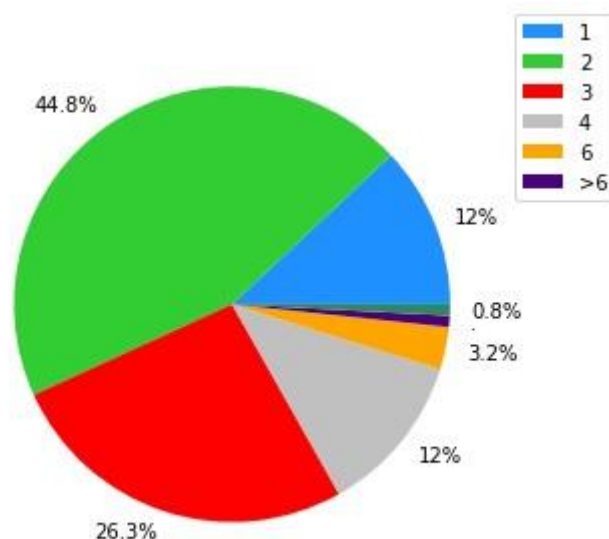


Table 11 Number of children

Description	Number	Percentage
1	72	12
2	269	44.8
3	158	26.3
4	72	12
5	19	3.2
6 and more	5	0.8

4.11 *Did the child/ren attend school?*

Figure 11 and Table 12 show that most respondents' children did attend school for a period. Their negative schooling experiences motivated their decision to home educate, as outlined in Section 3.

Figure 11 Did the child/ren attend school?

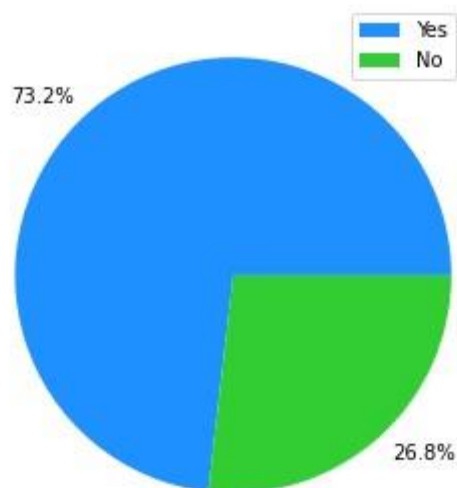


Table 12 Did the child/ren attend school?

Description	Number	Percentage
Yes	439	73.2
No	161	26.8

4.12 Did you start home educating before the lockdown?

It is necessary to look at Sections 4.11 and 4.12 together. The number of 'yes' responses in 4.11 must be viewed in consideration that this survey was conducted during COVID-19 pandemic, which saw a rise in the number of people choosing to home educate. However, the number of 'yes' in Section 4.12 shows that most respondents started home educating before lockdown.

Figure 12 Did you start home educating before the lockdown?

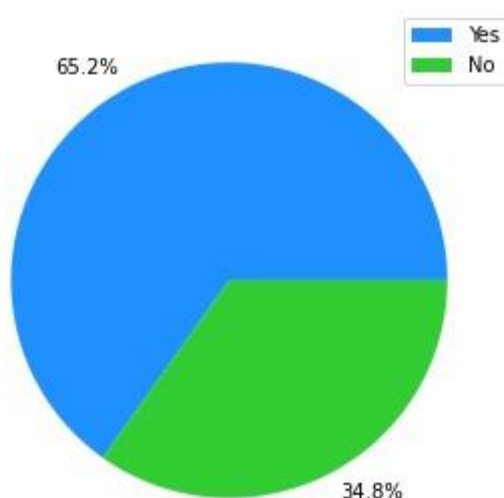


Table 13 Did you start home educating before the lockdown?

Description	Number	Percentage
Yes	391	65.2
No	209	34.8

4.13 What approach are you following?

In the questionnaire, there was a follow-up question that asked for details if the respondent chose the 'other' option (Figure 13 & Table 14). It was necessary to probe into the 10.3% who chose the 'other' option in this question. The responses to the follow-up questions showed that this 10.3% also practiced a combination of eclectic, curriculum, and self-directed approaches. In some homes, different children were following different approaches depending on their learning trajectory. The responses also showed the creativity of families to meet children's learning needs.

Figure 13 What approach are you following?

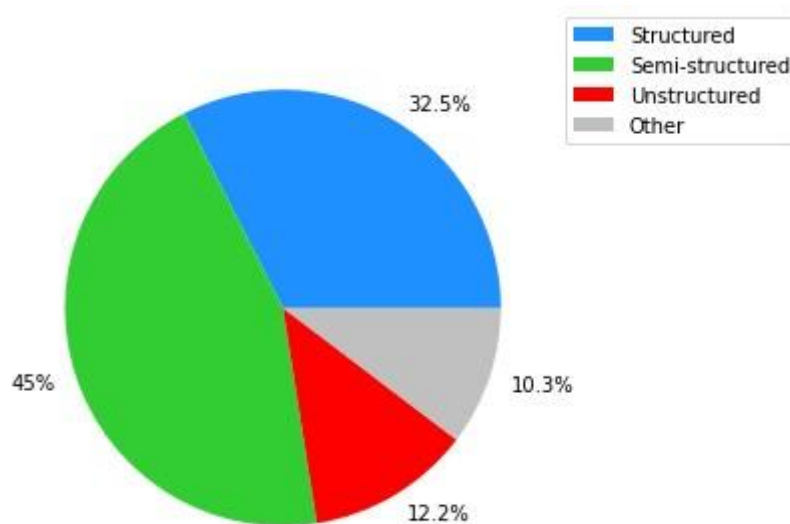


Table 14 What approach are you following?

Description	Number	Percentage
Structured: Curriculum from a service provider	195	32.5
Semi-Structured: Eclectic curriculum/create own curriculum	270	45
Unstructured: Natural learning/self-directed learning/unschooling	73	12.2
Other	62	10.3

4.14 How do you implement your home education approach?

Figure 14 and Table 15 show that most families choose to be home based to implement home education, denoting that most families adhere to the basic definition of home education where at least one parent stays at home and takes primary responsibility for facilitating and managing their children's education.

Figure 14 How do you implement your home education approach?

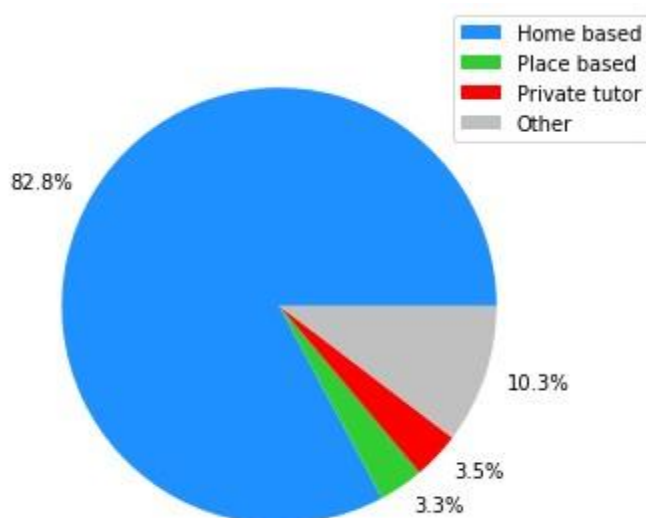


Table 15 How do you implement your home education approach?

Description	Number	Percentage
Home based (parent and/or child led)	497	82.8
Place based (children attend a learning centre)	20	3.3
Private tutor	21	3.5
Other	62	10.3

4.15 Does your approach include and/or require any formal assessment?

It is interesting to note that most home educators do not include any formal assessment. The data in Section 4.13 show that 67.5% of respondents do not use structured curriculums, and therefore, this data ties in with the results of this question (Figure 15 & Table 16) that 53% of the respondents do not have an official assessment protocol.

Figure 15 Does your approach include and/or require any formal assessment?

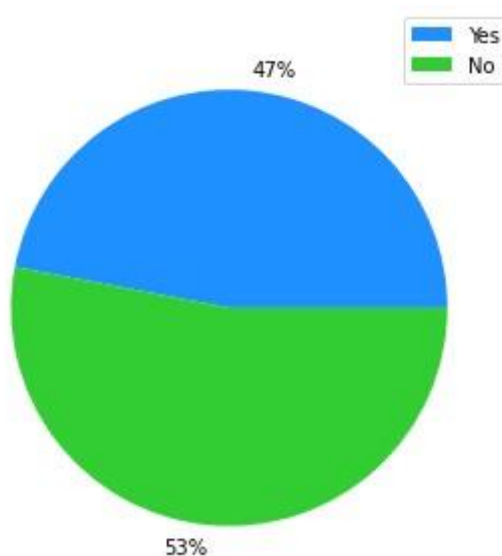


Table 16 Does your approach include and/or require any formal assessment?

Description	Number	Percentage
Yes	282	47
No	318	53

4.16 Have you made use of an external assessor, educational psychologist/occupational therapist/speech therapist? (600 responses)

Most respondents (67.5%) indicated that they use a semi-structured and eclectic approach (Section 4.13) that does not include any assessment, and therefore, it stands to reason that most of the respondents choose to not engage with an assessor or other educational professions in their home education journey (Figure 16 & Table 17). The reasons for not using an external assessor are explained in Section 4.17.

Figure 16 Have you made use of an external assessor, educational psychologist/occupational therapist/speech therapist?

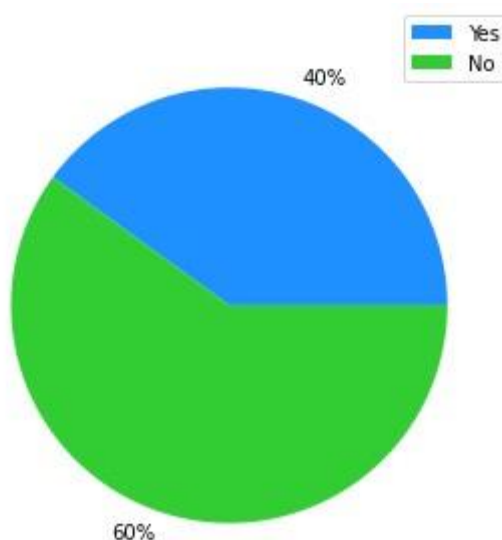


Table 17 Have you made use of an external assessor, educational psychologist/occupational therapist/speech therapist?

Description	Number	Percentage
Yes	240	40
No	360	60

4.17 What will best describe your reasons for NOT using an external assessor? (346 responses)

It appears that most of the respondents believe that no formal assessment is necessary, and that it is not part of their chosen approach, and Figure 17 and Table 18 show parents reasons for not using external assessors. However, in the follow-up question ‘How do you keep a record of your child’s progress, development and assessment?’, the following responses show that those who do not have formal assessment as part of their curriculum, still maintain some form of ongoing assessment in the learning experience of the children, by keeping record in the following ways:

- Portfolios of evidence of work completed;
- Completed tasks are assessed and filed;
- Parent observes and makes notes on the development of the child;
- Daily assessment after each task;
- Progress recorded on online programmes that tracks progress;
- Diary;
- Excel spreadsheets;
- Facilitator reports and children reporting on their own development;
- Observational progress from daily interaction with children; and
- Technology: use of photos, videos and social media forums.

Figure 17 What will best describe your reasons for NOT using an external assessor? (346 responses)

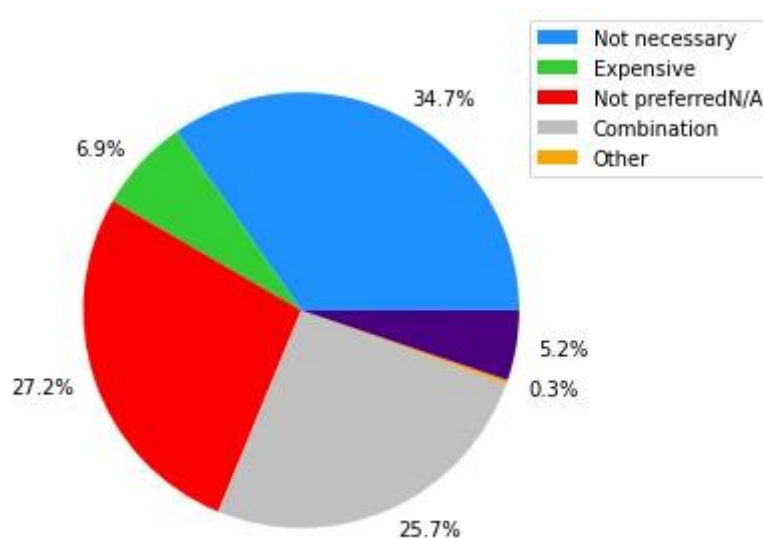


Table 18 What will best describe your reasons for NOT using an external assessor? (346 responses)

Description	Number	Percentage
Not necessary/required for the child (e.g., age of child)	120	34.7
Too expensive	24	6.9
Preferred approach does not require an external assessor	94	27.2
N/A Do not believe an external assessor is important/required for child's development	89	25.7
Combination of the above	1	0.3
Other	18	5.2

5 Final remarks

The data presented gives voice to the home education community in South Africa. Even though the sample is small, given the estimated 300 000 home educators in South Africa, it is still significant as the data provides the home education community, the formal education sector, and other interested parties with valuable insight into who, how, and why people are choosing to home educate their children. All the above empirical evidence should be considered in the context of whether the home education population and landscape have changed since 1994 when home education was made legal.

The data presented in this report as well as the qualitative strand of data from the questionnaire will be used by the researcher in future research publications.