

High school exiting options for home-schoolers in South Africa

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Home-schooling is an alternative to mainstream schooling where parents take responsibility for the education of their own children. This is an increasingly common choice for some who feel that they could better educate their child at home, choosing curricula of their choice that fits in with their family beliefs and values. However, the difficulty may come in securing a school leaver's certificate for the child at the end of Grade 12, with which they may gain access into tertiary institutions for further study. In this study an online survey tool was used to gain empirical data from parents of home-schoolers, assessing the various curriculum paths they chose to educate their children. It was found that there are three possible exit strategies for South African home-schoolers which provide a National Senior Certificate, or equivalent. Furthermore, various delivery methods and pedagogical and presentation styles were identified. In addition, the costs incurred and the difficulties presented by various curriculum providers were explored. Finally the findings are summarized and recommendations are made for policy changes that will allow alternate access routes into tertiary institutions.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

In South Africa, as in many countries around the world, parents often seek alternative strategies to educate their children. The culmination of this schooling is a Grade 12 exit certificate; which will surely open doors to further study and a tertiary qualification of some sort. However, many parents who choose to home-school often find themselves in a predicament when it comes to acquiring this necessary certification. According to the official census conducted in South Africa in 2011 (Census 2011 Statistical release – P0301.4), 56 857 learners were being home-schooled. 12 000 of these were children over the age of 18, (van der Eems, Feb 2013). However, these figures may be inaccurate because in many provinces there was no allowance made for home-schooling as an option, there were only private or public schools as options in the census questionnaire. Furthermore, many parents are nervous about admitting that they home-school, so it is safe to assume that this is an underestimation of the true number of home-schoolers in SA.

I began my research by searching existing research about home-schoolers and home-schooling that relates to the South African context. It became immediately apparent that this was a scantily researched subject in South Africa, and even internationally. There have been some studies on why people chose to home-school and even on how they home-schooled their children, but nothing on how to gain an exit qualification in South Africa. This prompted me further to examine what options, if any, are available for South African parents to gain a school exit qualification for their children, without having to go through the regular state or private school systems? Furthermore, I wanted to establish, if there were alternative options, what they were and how they compared, with regards to cost, practicality, and delivery of content? Hence I have focused on the curricula which is available, and how parents have experienced the curricula they have worked with, and the whole issue of acquiring a National Senior Certificate or equivalent school exiting certificate.

My research report is divided into five sections. In my introduction, I have focused on the purpose and rationale behind my topic. I follow this in section two, with a brief Literature Review of what has been researched in the field of home-schooling, thus justifying the need for my area of research. In the third section I then look at my own approach to researching this topic, the methodology and the research instrument. In the fourth section I examine the findings from my survey. Finally I end off with a discussion, which includes my recommendations and the conclusion.

1.1. Rationale and purpose of the study:

After identifying the gap in South African research on the topic of home-schoolers' experiences of gaining a school-leaving certificate, I decided I would collect empirical data on this topic and so broaden the data available on home-schooling in South Africa. I further hoped to improve researchers' understanding on how families could educate their children at home and still gain the appropriate final certificate. I further hoped that my study would enable educational researchers and home-school families to have a greater understanding of which curricula or programs can offer suitable exit exams at Grade 12 level. In addition I hoped to be able to contrast and compare the curricula available, in order to examine the ease of availability, the costs and the delivery modes of each curriculum, and finally to elicit from parents, which curricula were the most user-friendly and practical options available. I was also interested in finding out how many home-schoolers have

actually acquired their National Senior Certificate (NSC) or equivalent without state or private school assistance and whether these pupils had been accepted into tertiary institutions of some kind.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Worldwide, home-schooling is accepted as a constitutional right of parents, even in South Africa (Cumming, Mawdley & De Waal, 2006). Many parents believe that this form of education is superior to those offered by state departments and even private school institutions (Brynard, 2007; Sheffer and Farenga, 2004; Weichers and Bester, 2006). Research conducted across 25 nations evidences that home-schoolers usually achieve significantly better results than their institutional counterparts (Weichers and Bester, 2006).

Those who support home-schooling, for example, Sheffer and Farenga (2004), in their radio interview state that institutionalized schooling is unnatural and leads to all sorts of behavioural, emotional and educational issues. They refer to older home-school champions who have been influential in the lives of several decades of home-schoolers, such as Graves (1937) and Holt (1964, 1976, 2003).

There is certainly a range of research on why people choose to home-school, not just in South Africa but as a worldwide trend. These reasons range from mistrust of the government and its 'propaganda', to religious values, locality of the family – perhaps living in a foreign speaking country or far away from schools, to financial reasons and even to children's special education needs (De Waal and Theron, 2008; Oosthuizen and Bouwer, 2007; Van Loggerenberg, 2004; Lymen, 1998; Isenberg, 2007). Finally, Brynard (2007) and several others feel that the family exerts a more lasting and powerful impression on the child than the institution.

Research has also been conducted in South Africa and internationally on the potential hardships and issues that are unique to home-schooling families. For example, it seems that mothers in particular take the brunt of dual roles and responsibilities (Van Schalkwyk and Bouwer, 2011). Intensive research has been done on the role of the mother in home-schooling (Oosthuizen and Bouwer, 2007).

In addition research was even conducted in South Africa on the effects of home-schooling on a particular child (Van Schalkwyk and Bouwer, 2011). However, this particular research study is an isolated and subjective case study. Because of this, it cannot be said to be the generalizable experience of the population of home-school children.

Nonetheless home-schooling is clearly on the upsurge as parents both in South Africa and abroad, fear dropping standards and bad influences at conventional schools (Brynard, 2007; Moore, Lemmer and Van Wyk, 2004). Modern technology and internet access have all aided the popularity and support available for home-schoolers in South Africa (Van Loggerenberg, 2004).

One of the biggest challenges for home-schoolers in South Africa, still remains the acquisition of a valid school-leavers' certificate; a National Senior Certificate or equivalent, which would be accepted by tertiary institutions or colleges for further study. Research on the curricula available in South

Africa, which would be able to offer a valid exit point is elusive and for this reason I felt it would be beneficial to look into curriculum options and routes which home-schoolers are currently using and which are available for South African home-schoolers to pursue in order to graduate from high school.

I explored several South African home-schooling websites, in order to establish which types of NSC, or equivalent certificate, the various curriculum providers offered. I discovered that there are only two official paths to take in attaining a school leaving certificate. The first is the South African NSC and the second option is to acquire a foreign qualification. If the child wants to pursue an academic matric for university exemption purposes, then the best methods of attaining a NSC with university exemption would be to attain the NSC or International Examinations Board (IEB) qualification, or alternatively to take the foreign qualification route. Here the child can acquire the British Cambridge AS or A level Certificate, or an American GED (General Education Certificate) - along with an American university acceptance letter - or sit the American University Entrance Examination known as SATS (Scholastic Aptitude Tests). Finally some South African universities do recognise the American ACE (Accelerated Christian Education) Grade 12 (van der Eems, 2013).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The critical questions identified for this study are:

- (a) What routes are available for home-schoolers to take in order to acquire a school leavers' certificate?**
- (b) Which curricula are able to provide a National Senior Certificate or equivalent school leavers' certificate?**
- (c) What are the different costs, delivery methods and pedagogical and presentation styles of the various curriculum options available to home-schoolers?**

The best way to gain generalizable and reliable empirical data was by means of a web-based survey which would reach a number of home-schooling families across South Africa.

3.1. Research Design:

The research method used for this study was a questionnaire to gain insight from home-schooling families as to what curricula they had used to get their children through school. More specifically I wanted to find out what curricula were available in South Africa that could offer a NSC or equivalent.

This research was based upon empirical data collected from a quantitative, internet-based, on-line questionnaire as the instrument of data collection. Furthermore, I chose to ask close-ended questions, but I also made allowances for some open-ended responses. I felt this would enable clarification if respondents wanted to elaborate on their answers. Thus the survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data.

There are several obvious advantages to using a questionnaire as outlined by Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2007). The first is the ability to gain specific targeted information in a well sequenced way. Secondly the questionnaire's ability to have easy to answer close-ended questions for quantitative

data collection is an advantage. Furthermore explicit open-ended questions where more qualitative and personalised insights were required could be included. In addition, data analysis was fairly simple to execute. The online survey was user-friendly and enabled respondents to choose for themselves when, where and if they wanted to participate. In addition, it was convenient, not mail dependent or paper dependent, and could penetrate potentially into any home which had internet access at the touch of a button, at a time convenient to the respondents with minimal cost factors. A further advantage was that the researcher was removed from the equation for the two month duration of the questionnaire. The biggest challenges were that I could only pose 10 questions, and the open-ended questions elicited a complex variety of responses which was not as easy to analyse and categorise as the quantitative data.

3.2. Sampling:

I targeted my home-schooling audience by contacting various home-schooling organizations in the country which have websites and asked them if they would be prepared to place a link to my survey on their websites. Along with the link was an accompanying description explaining the nature of the research, the fact that it would be voluntary and anonymous and a once off survey. The participants were then recruited from this on-line survey.

The names of some of the home-schooling organisations I contacted were: The Pestalozzi Trust, Lindy Greaves, Christian Home-school Education, Western Cape Home-schooling Association and The South African Association for Home-schooling. I felt it best not to contact curriculum suppliers as their members would be exclusively using a specific curriculum and I wanted to get a more unbiased assessment of which curricula were being used out there. The home-schooling organisations were extremely accommodating and I was easily able to secure 75 on-line survey responses within the 2 month time-frame I had allocated myself, from February 2014 to end of March 2014.

The limitations of this method of sampling are that this survey would only be accessible to participants who had access to the internet, and who would potentially visit these home-school websites. The home-school websites I approached were provincial and national, so therefore accessible to any home-school families within South Africa with access to the internet. Participants would also be 'self-selected' by virtue of the nature of an online questionnaire.

3.3. Questionnaire design:

I made use of an existing on-line survey tool called "Survey Monkey", which allows one to set up a questionnaire with variations of multiple choice or optional or yes / no responses. One is also able to set parameters such as whether the participant must answer a question before proceeding to the next one. In addition, I could choose to have open-ended and/or close-ended questions. However, I could only ask ten questions on the survey template. The template of the tool was professional looking and extremely user friendly. It also had many added features, such as notifying me via e-mail each time someone had submitted a new response. Furthermore, the up-grade version of the survey allowed me to save, store and print out the responses and compiled graphical displays of the data. As well as all that, it identified common trends occurring in the data for me. It allowed participants

to choose to participate and then to fill in the survey in their own time, in a quick, user-friendly, unobtrusive and completely anonymous manner.

The only difficult part was asking the correct questions in order to secure the answers to my three crucial questions; namely what methods can home-schoolers use to secure a NSC? What curricula are available and can offer the NSC or an equivalent? Finally, what the differences were between the various curricula options in terms of cost, delivery and presentation styles?

This on-line survey application was an excellent choice as it greatly simplified my sampling process – participants chose to be involved themselves. The target sample population were existing home-school parents, who had internet access and were wide-spread across South Africa, geographically. Posting a link on home-school websites enabled me to reach this target group in a fairly effortless manner.

Furthermore, gathering empirical, computer generated data and graphical representations, ensured that my data would have a high level of reliability and accuracy. The feedback from a large audience made the data trends generalizable. And I felt this method of investigation was not only interpretively valid but trustworthy. In addition, choosing to use an on-line survey ensured that absolutely no ethical contraventions could possibly occur, as the survey was voluntary and anonymous, with participants only completing the survey if they wanted to and further, having the ability to quit the survey if they didn't want to finish it.

4. FINDINGS:

4.1. Profile of respondents - geographical regions:

When launching the survey, I had hoped to elicit a response from across South Africa. However, 52% of the respondents indicated they lived in Gauteng and 18.67% were from the Western Cape. Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal each provided 5.33% of participants. The Eastern Cape yielded 4% of participants and North West Province a further 2.67% and finally, only 1.33% indicated they were from the Free State (displayed in Figure 3 below). Unfortunately there were no respondents from the Northern Cape. There is no national data which indicates how many home-schoolers are present in each province, so it is impossible to be certain that my sample does or doesn't represent the South African home-school population accurately. In addition, the Northern Cape represents the smallest population sample according to the 2011 census statistics.

4.2. Profile of respondents – year of study:

The survey data indicated that 76% of the respondent's children were currently attempting to achieve their Grade 12 certificate (Figure 1), which meant that most respondents were my direct target group. Of these, 25.33% had other children who had already successfully completed their NSC or equivalent. Of the children who had completed their schooling at home, 72.2% were currently enrolled in or had already completed a tertiary degree in South Africa. 16.66% of children who had completed their home-schooling were enrolled in a college or apprenticeship, 5.5% were enrolled

doing certificate courses, whilst only 5.7% of respondent’s children were currently doing a gap year or uninvolved in further study.

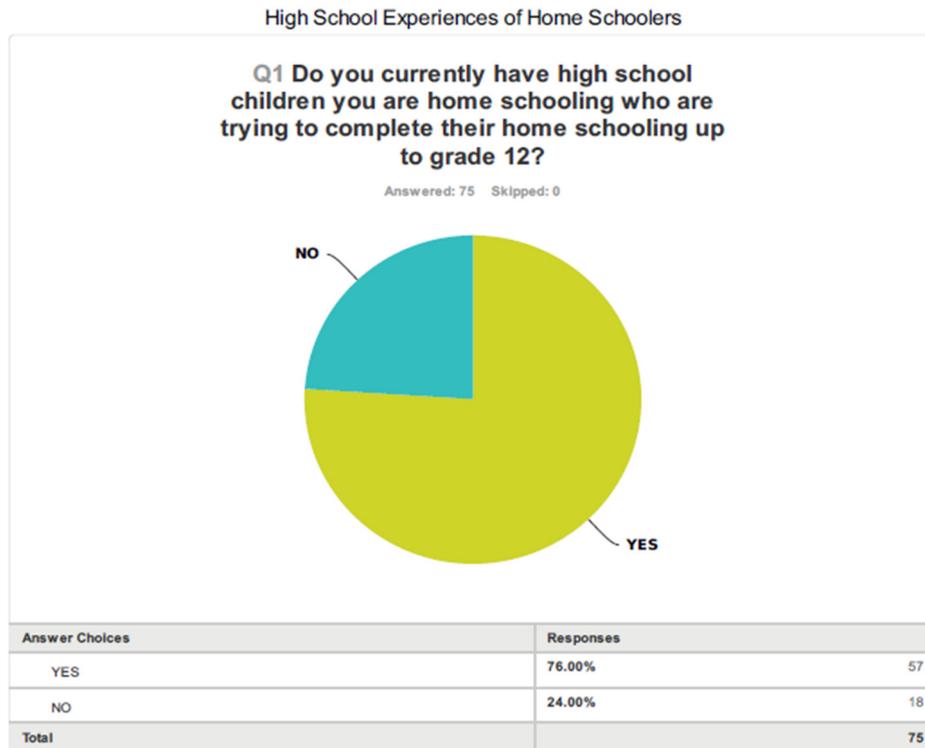


Figure 1. Respondents who had children working towards acquiring a Grade 12 certificate.

Some of the Professional and General University Tertiary Qualifications respondents said their children were pursuing were: B Com, BSc Agriculture, BSc Architecture, Medicine, Dip Mus Ed, B Ed, B Com Communication Management, Mechatronics, Honours in Economics, BA Multimedia, BA, BA Fine Arts, BA Communication Science, B Health Sciences Honours, Occupational Therapy, BSc Food Management and BSc Computing. Diploma courses include: Montessori Teaching, Business Diploma, Refrigeration Certificate, Early Childhood Development, Millwright Trifocus, and Personal Trainer certificates. In addition, some parents mentioned their children being on the Dean’s Honour Role at their respective universities.

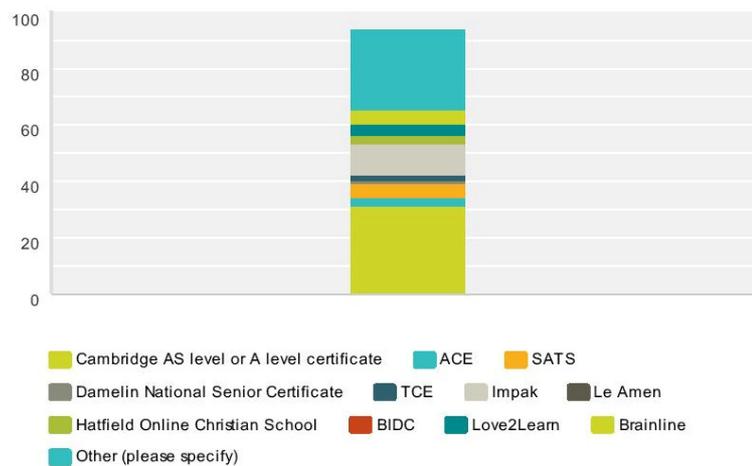
4.3. Curricula options:

Prior to the survey I researched all the curriculum service providers that offer home-schoolers a curriculum that provides an accepted Grade 12 certificate. Apart from the well-known foreign direct service providers (Cambridge and the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs)), several other curriculum service providers were mentioned by respondents. I then researched all these service providers in order to establish which exit qualification was offered. At this point it was established that, despite the large number of curriculum service providers, only one of three options are available for South African home-schoolers which are accepted by South African Universities. These are (1) the South African NSC or IEB qualifications and two foreign qualifications: (2) the British AS levels and (3) the American GED and SATs.

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Q3 What curriculum did you chose for your child to attain their Grade 12 school leaving certificate? (A Grade 12 school leaving certificate would be a National Senior Certificate or an equivalent qualification which is recognised by South African tertiary institutions) If you have used more than one curriculum type, please tick both options.

Answered: 75 Skipped: 0



| Answer Choices | Responses |
|---|-----------|
| Cambridge AS level or A level certificate | 41.33% 31 |
| ACE | 4.00% 3 |
| SATS | 6.67% 5 |
| Damelin National Senior Certificate | 1.33% 1 |
| TCE | 2.67% 2 |
| Impak | 14.67% 11 |
| Le Amen | 0.00% 0 |
| Hatfield Online Christian School | 4.00% 3 |
| BIDC | 0.00% 0 |
| Love2Learn | 5.33% 4 |
| Brainline | 6.67% 5 |
| Other (please specify) | 38.67% 29 |

Figure 2. Graphical presentation of curriculum providers.

Providers offering the NSC or the IEB are: Damelin, Intec, Impak, Le Amen, Hatfield Christian Academy and Brainline. In addition respondents mentioned Nukleus and Footprints. Service providers offering AS levels are: Cambridge, Theocentric Christian Education (TCE), British

International Distance College (BIDC) and Love2Learn. Providers offering American qualifications include Accelerated Christian Education (ACE), SATs and GED (Figure 2).

With regards to the various curricula that parents use, 49.53% respondents have chosen a syllabus which offers the Cambridge AS or A level Certificate as an exit strategy, whilst only 26.77% of the respondents opted to do the NSC or IEB exam. A further 10.91% of the respondents choose an American exit or benchmark test like the GED, SATs or ACE certificate (Figure 2). This certainly does raise the question why so many parents prefer to choose a foreign qualification to our South African National Senior Certificate qualification? This is cause for concern, as it either indicates that parents have no faith in local qualifications, or that they are more difficult to acquire outside of a structured school, than a foreign qualification is. Based on comments from respondents, it would seem to be the latter, as without exception the respondents were sending their children to South African universities, but found that the universities were happy to accept their children with foreign qualifications. In addition, The NSC and IEB Grade 12 certificates require other tasks and assessments to be completed during the year. Due to the schools based assessment (SBC) component of the NSC, it is very difficult to offer the NSC via distance education. The SBC component requires that learners have to do tests, tasks and portfolios and have them marked. This becomes problematic for external students to comply with whereas the foreign qualifications require no additional assessments but are all based on a single examination assessment.

4.4. Curriculum delivery and presentation:

Interestingly, 49% of home-schoolers have at some point switched curriculum or indicated that they would switch curriculum if they needed to. The overwhelming, top reason cited for changing curriculum was: "to get a recognised matric". The open ended feedback questions allowed respondents to state their reasons for swapping or changing curricula. Responses could be categorised into two broad categories: the curricula itself or the curriculum providers. Respondent's reasons given about the curricula itself, were that the curricula was not good quality, was boring or that it opposed their religious beliefs, or that resources were too American, or that the material did not suit their child's learning style, and some wanted a more technology driven , as opposed to paper driven , syllabus.

Other reasons expressed for changing were more the 'fault' of the actual curriculum suppliers. Commonly mentioned issues relating to curriculum providers were: "inconsistencies with marking, appalling service, lack of delivery of goods or consistent late delivery of materials, and no academic support available and cost factors". Finally if a Grade 12 exit certificate could not be attained, respondents had also opted to swap to a curriculum which could deliver a recognised exit certificate. These are interesting observations as it shows that individual parents are particular about what they expect from their child's curriculum. Parents want to have a say in their child's education. Home-school parents have high expectations of service providers and support systems. And finally, that for the most part, they most definitely do want a school leavers certificate at the end of the day, and will often comply with whatever demands curriculum providers and examination boards expect in order to acquire the certificate at the end of the child's schooling.

In the survey, questions were asked about the presentation and delivery modes of the various curricula. Respondents were able to choose more than one option, if their curriculum relied on several delivery modes. It was found that 61.33% of respondents said their curricula were mostly text book based. 48% said their curriculum was self-study based, 24% used on-line lessons, and 22.67% used computer tutorials. A further 17.33% used DVDs, and only 13.33% were private tutor reliant (Figure 3). These findings indicate that technology as a means of learning is becoming more popular and increasingly relied upon by home-schoolers.

High School Experiences of Home Schoolers

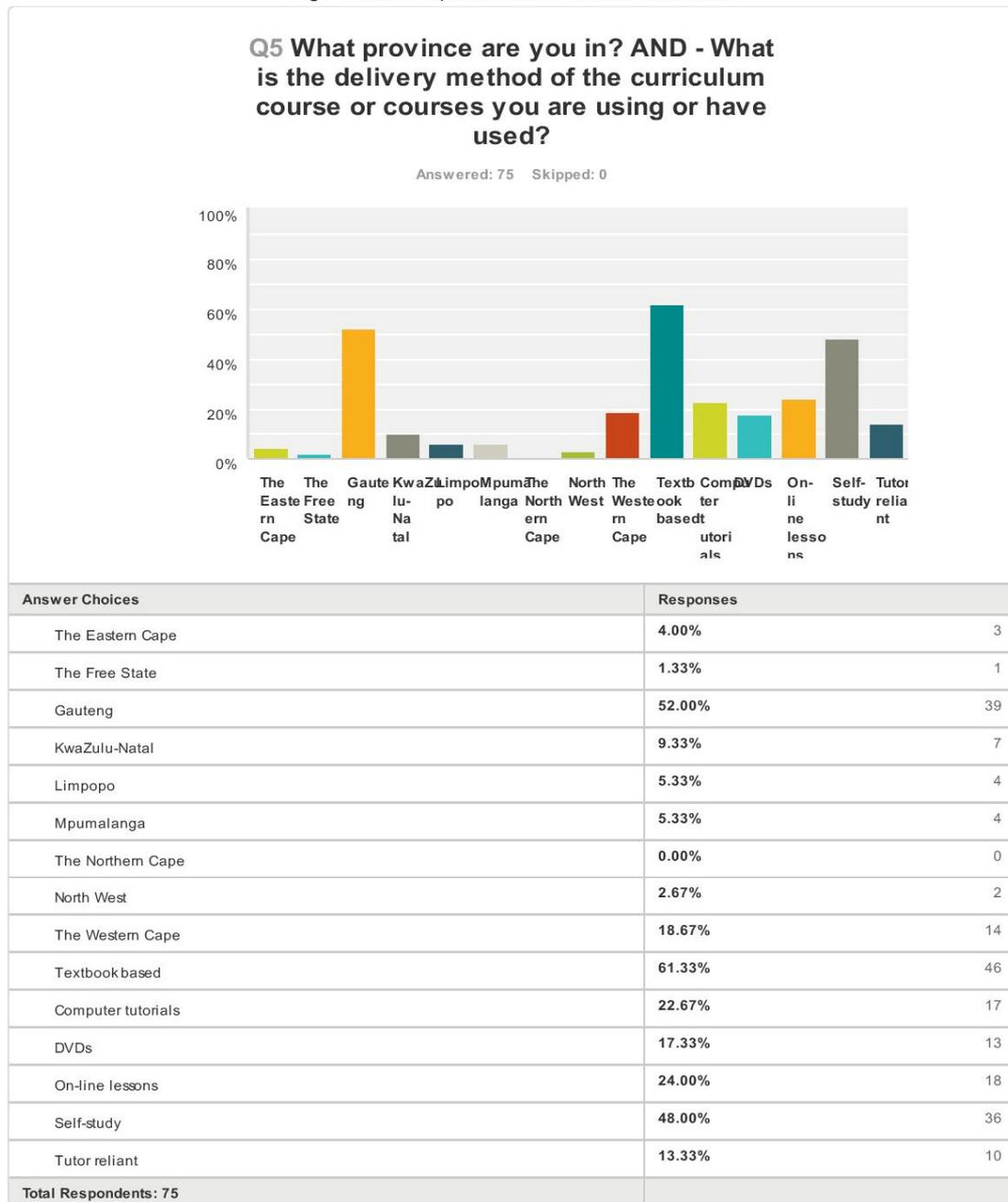


Figure 3. The geographical profile of respondents and curriculum delivery methods.

4.5. Efficiency of delivery mode:

Regarding the delivery of the curricula, 72% of parents mentioned that they were happy with the efficiency of the curricula delivery method, whilst 28% said that they had experienced challenges and difficulties with delivery and support of their curriculum (Figure 4). The following challenges were identified: bad service, unreliable assessments and cost factors. Respondent’s commented on: “rude or unhelpful curriculum providers who were unable to assist when support was required, did not mark assignments in time, sometimes having to wait as long as 2 months for work to come back, and providers inability to keep track of payment records, incorrect marks on official reports, unqualified student advisors, and that academic support for challenging subjects - such as Chemistry - is often lacking”. Another complaint was that postage from overseas is very expensive, huge taxes are placed on the incoming material, and it takes a long time to ship here, and items can get lost in the mail, furthermore, Teacher Resource books are highly expensive, especially with the exchange rate. Another problem is that no immediate help is available when necessary and private tutors are very expensive. However, late arrival of material and slow assignment feedback was cited most frequently by respondents as their major frustration. This survey found that the most common complaint from parents is bad service from curriculum service providers and suppliers, inferior curricula or academic standards and to a much lesser degree the cost factors.

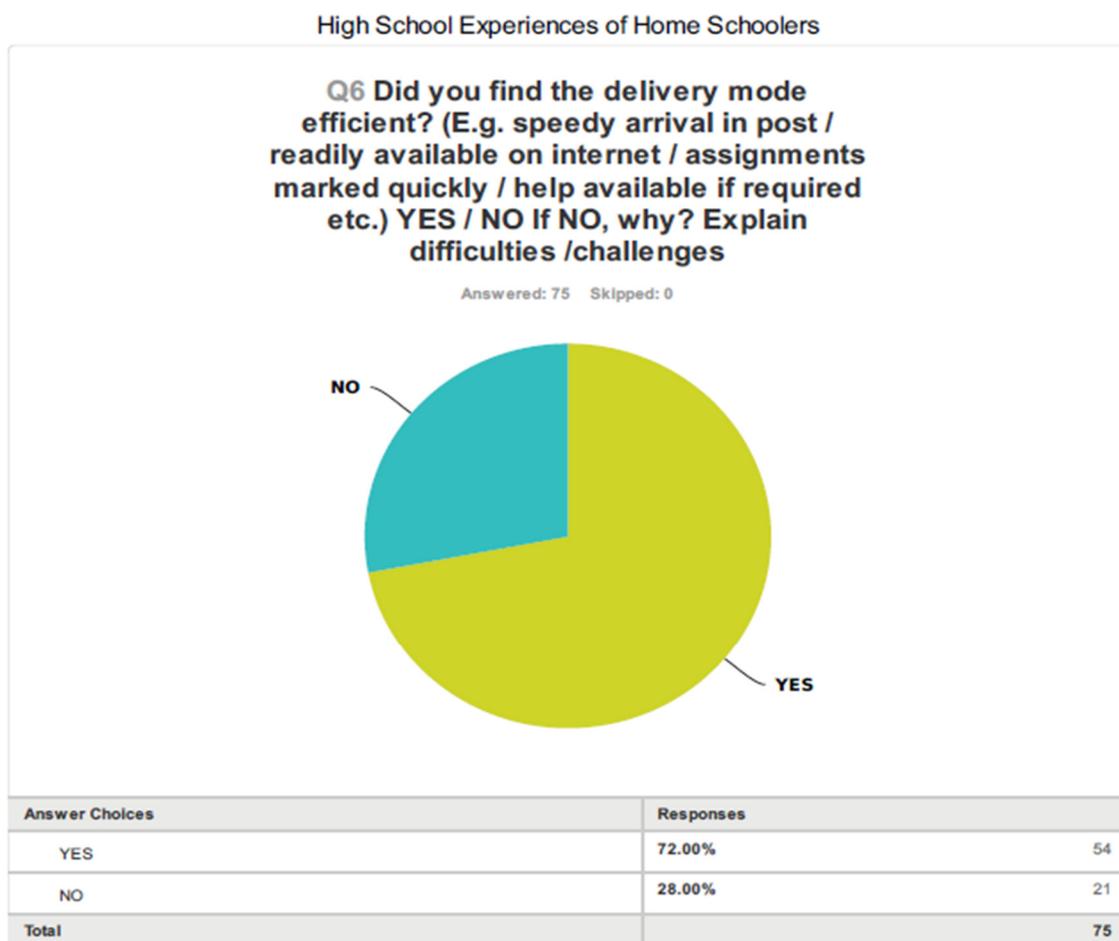


Figure 4. Efficiency of delivery modes.

However, on the plus side, 72% parents were very satisfied with their curriculum, and would not hesitate to recommend it to others. The trend showed Cambridge curriculum users to be the happiest with their curriculum. Some of the positive comments from participants were: they enjoyed the transparency of certain curriculum providers (Cambridge) who had past papers and many other resources available on-line at no cost. Another advantage was that the qualification was accepted by South African universities and was of an exceptionally high standard. These respondents found their material “exciting, interesting, comprehensive, of an excellent standard, stimulating and enjoyable”. In addition, other parents found their curriculum to be easy to manage, well-paced, they found help was readily available, staff at the curriculum providers were helpful, tutors were passionate about their subjects, textbooks were well written and researched, standard and quality of books was excellent, curriculum is well-rounded with good choices, instructions are clear, values are good and it’s user friendly for parents. These are very interesting comments as so many of them are in direct contrast to previous complaints from parents. However, that being said, the experience can obviously change dramatically from one curriculum provider to the next. In addition the negative comments were consistently aimed at particular curriculum providers whilst the positive comments were predominantly directed at Cambridge and Cambridge curriculum providers.

4.6. Curriculum costs:

When asked what parents spent on their different curricula, the discrepancy was as vast as the variety of curricula out there. Some stated they spent as little as R600 per year whilst others paid up to R22 000 per year. On average though, parents spend around R8000 – R10 000 per year, which averages out at less than R1000 per month. This equates to between R666 and R833 per month, which is less than most former Model C schools charge per month. It remains one of the most affordable ways to provide a good quality education for one’s child. Parents are able to select a curriculum they can afford. However, many curriculum providers require an upfront payment for the year’s curriculum, which can be substantial. Other curriculum providers offer monthly fee payments and month by month support. Nonetheless, it remains a potentially tricky and costly process to secure the necessary qualifications, although certainly much cheaper than many state and private schools.

4.7. Top criteria in curricula choice:

When asked what the most important criteria for their child’s curriculum, parents prioritise quite different things. Respondents were given the opportunity to rank the order of importance they attach to certain criteria. The most common number one ranked priority highlighted the **quality of the curricula** as their major criteria. Next parents liked the curriculum to be **user-friendly**. Listed third was **recognition by South African Universities**. Fourth, **affordability** was listed as the next most important feature. This was followed in fifth position by **variety of subject choices**, and then in sixth position by **tutors being readily available**. In seventh position, **feedback and on-going assessment** was seen as important. Finally **computer based or Internet based programs** was listed as least important. This indicates that most home-school parents are looking for; a good quality, affordable,

user-friendly curriculum, which must be recognised by local universities and preferably with tutors and feedback support available (Figure 5).

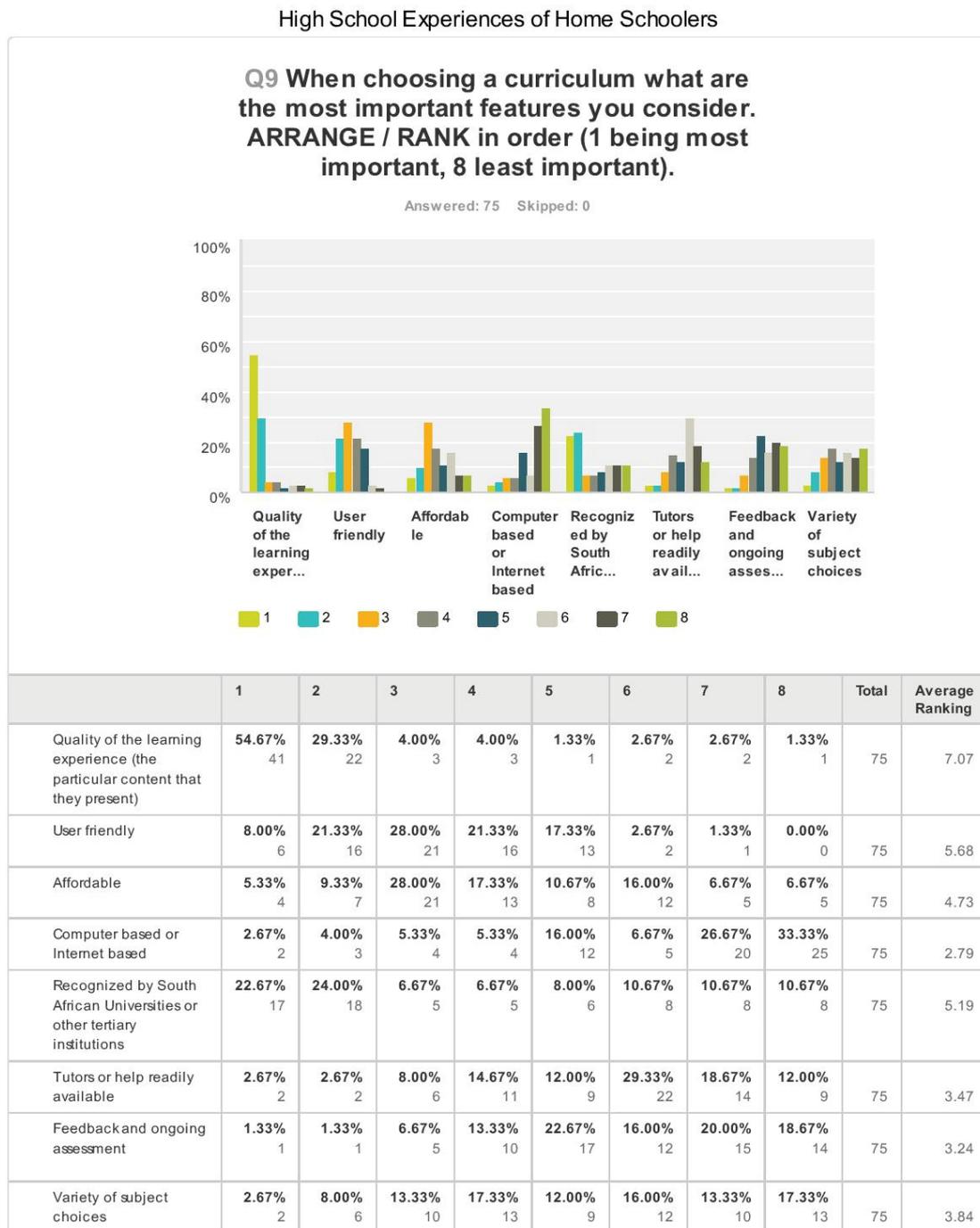


Figure 5. Ranking of features considered most important in curriculum choice.

4.8. Did parents feel a Matric Certificate was essential?

The final survey question asked if parents felt a school leaving certificate was absolutely necessary for their child's future. Interestingly, 84% of home-school parents felt it was necessary to attain a school leaving certificate, whilst only 16% did not (Figure 6). This reveals that most parents still believe it is essential for their child to acquire a school leaving certificate. In the open-ended question, the most commonly cited reason for needing to acquire this certificate, was the need to gain entrance into tertiary institutions for further study. Thus most respondents believed that post school qualifications are essential for a well-rounded education and to prepare one's child for life. Parents felt that children needed to be able to study later if they wanted to. They also said it was very important to them that their children study after school. One parent said "a good education is the best gift we can give our children." Another respondent commented: "I want to give my child the best head start in life I can; not having this piece of paper may seriously disadvantage the student and close potential doors to further training; it is the parents responsibility to give their children the broadest range of options and choices possible. The choice to study further may only be pursued if the qualification is attained." Other respondents commented that they would like their children to have the opportunity of international universities as well as local universities so that there are more options available for them. One parent commented that "the only people who do not need a Matric Certificate are entrepreneurs, and since we cannot guarantee that our children will be good business owners, they need a certificate in order to obtain work."

On the other hand, a couple of respondents spoke quite frankly about their loss of faith in acquiring the NSC as a ticket to their child's future. There were a few parents that felt if the child does not need the certificate then why bother. They felt that home-schooling offered many other exceptional skills and life-training that would equip a child to succeed in life. Several parents mentioned that their children who don't have certificates are already running their own successful businesses. Others voiced "education ought to take a long hard look at individuality"... and "learning specifically for exit exams is so limiting to their education." Another felt, "Our children would gain more following their interests and learning through experience." Finally it was felt amongst these respondents that: "if the child did not require a NSC for tertiary study then why pursue it. Rather let them seek qualifications or skills through other channels". Even amongst those who felt the exit certificate was critical, it was commonly confessed that they wished it was not essential but that their children wanted to go to university, so it became a 'necessary evil'.

This alerts us to the fact that the world is changing, and that people's perceptions of a good education are not necessarily the same as twenty or thirty years ago. Many people want to take back the responsibility for their children's education. They are pragmatic in their expectations of what their child's education can achieve for them and are well aware of the short-falls in education systems. However, they are bound by that same system's rules in terms of access to tertiary education facilities. Hence they don't like the system, but there aren't enough alternative options. This gives rise to further opportunities for research.

Many parents expressed the desire for alternative ways of granting access to universities, such as "portfolios, and life experience as opposed to the cookie cutter education we are currently forced to comply with". Many parents suggested university entrance exams which students could prepare for

in a variety of more suitable ways or expressed a strong desire for benchmarked entrance exams to be made accessible to children that aren't in the system to gain access into our universities.

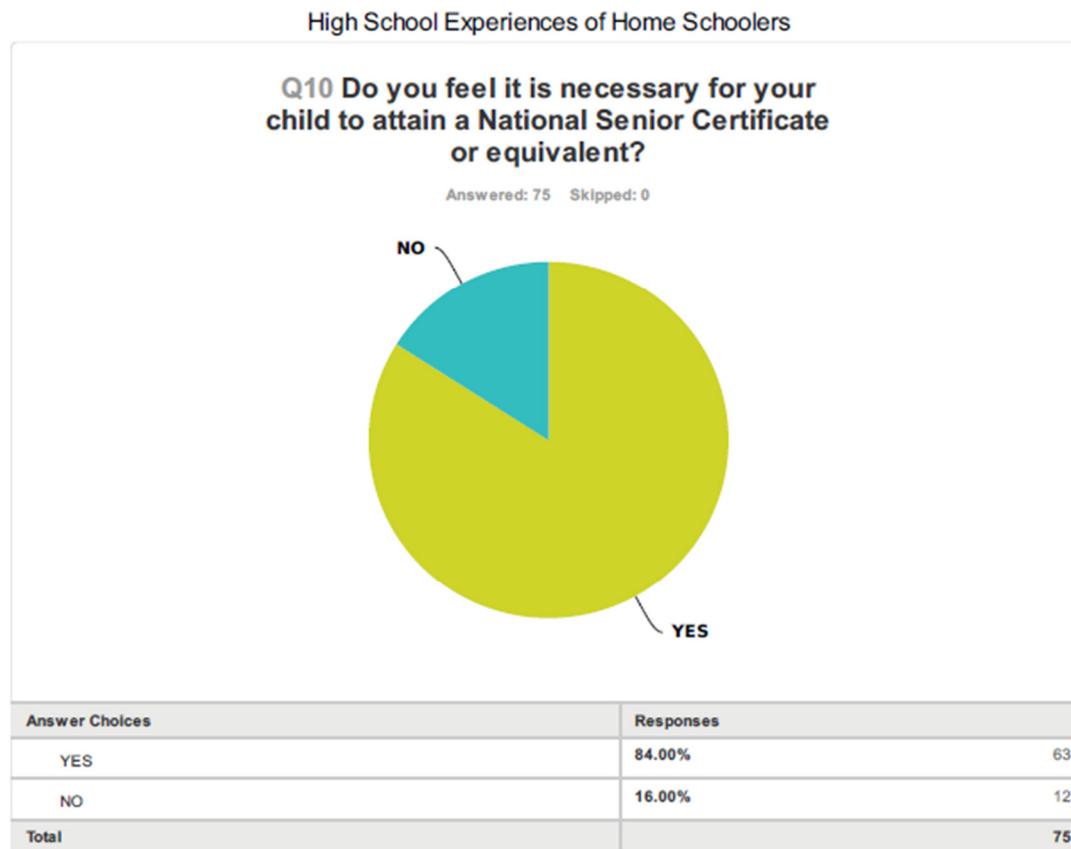


Figure 6. The considered necessity to acquire a NSC or equivalent qualification.

5. DISCUSSION:

In this final section, I summarise the key findings:

(a) What routes are available for home-schoolers to take in order to acquire a school leavers' certificate?

From the survey it has been established that there are many different curriculum providers. However, these service providers can only offer three actual types of exit qualifications which are acceptable by Higher Education South Africa (HESA) for university exemption. The recognised certificates are the British Cambridge AS and A levels, the South African NSC or IEB certificate, and the American university entrance exam SATS or the American GED certificate. The routes for outside candidates to acquire these necessary certifications are either to sign up with accredited service providers, local schools or sit the exams in accredited examination centres. So, it is indeed possible to find alternative ways of acquiring the certificates, but it is limited, complicated, and often expensive.

Sadly, home-schoolers do feel disadvantaged in terms of equal access to universities. Parents feel they need to comply with stipulated exit exams in order not to disadvantage their children from tertiary opportunities. There is a strong desire from amongst the home-school community that benchmark tests or university entrance exams be given the same status they carry in other countries

such as the SATS in America. And that based on certain academic standards being met, external candidates be afforded the right to be judged on their academic ability and suitability to meet university requirements, and not on the current NSC demands and curriculum. Although South Africa has recently introduced the National Benchmark Tests (NBTs) which screens for university entrance suitability and performance level testing, this test cannot substitute a NSC or be used to gain access into a tertiary institution without being accompanied by a NSC or equivalent certificate (Yeld, 2007). Constitutionally parents have the right to educate their children in a manner they feel fit as long as it is beneficial to their child. However, in practicality parents do not have the right to tertiary education unless they comply with the government's norms and standards in terms of a Grade 12 certificate. Hopefully further research and investigation into alternative exit routes and university entrance possibilities for home-schoolers will be conducted in the not too distant future.

(b) Which curricula are able to provide a National Senior Certificate or equivalent school leavers' certificate?

As explained in Findings (Section 4.3 Curricula options), despite the large number of curriculum service providers, there are only three different Grade 12 qualifications offered by all these providers that are accepted by tertiary institutions as entry level qualification.

1. The National Senior Certificate (NSC) or the International Examination Board exams (IEB) are the two local providers of school leaving certificates. Curriculum service providers such as Damelin, Intec, Impak, Le Amen and Brainline all offer either the NSC or IEB certificates as exit routes. Hatfield Christian Academy offers an on-line IEB Matric in conjunction with their day school.
2. Cambridge, on the other hand, offers the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) which SAQA equate to the South African Grade 11. Further, the AS levels can be taken. These are equivalent to Grade 12 according to both SAQA and HESA. If desired one can even sit the A levels which are equivalent to 1st year university or a post-matric certification. Cambridge does not require any evidence of previous grades attained. The candidate simply pays the exam fee, receives a candidate number and arranges to write in a certified Cambridge exam venue. These exams are available in two sittings: May/June and Oct/ Nov each year. This makes Cambridge a very feasible option for home-schoolers who often cannot prove previous grade levels, or who may not have reports and benchmark grades to fall back on. This may also explain why so many home-schoolers choose this option when it comes time to acquire their school leaving certificate, as opposed to the South African NSC or IEB options. In addition it is not imperative that the IGCSE's or AS levels are written before you attempt the AS levels or the A levels. Also, Cambridge have an extremely transparent system in that all syllabus requirements, recommended texts and DVDs, tutorials together with past papers and mark schedules are readily available on the Internet. In addition, they offer a comprehensive range of subject choices to candidates.

It is perfectly easy for home-schoolers to access all the information and prepare themselves for the exam without the help of an institution or even a local service provider. However, when it comes to the more challenging or subject specialised areas such as Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics, students may require the assistance of tutors and this can become both essential and expensive. There are also several curriculum service providers that offer Cambridge and will

tutor or support students with academic outlines, assignments and past papers via distance or even in designated tutor centres. These Cambridge service providers are, to name the main ones: British International Distance College (BIDC), Love2 Learn, Theocentric Christian Education (TCE), CL Education, CIE Tuition Centre. Also, some private schools offer the Cambridge qualification, such as St Charles in Pietermaritzburg and St Johns College in Johannesburg. These Cambridge schools also offer their schools as accredited examination centres for outside pupils during examination periods. Based on acceptable results Cambridge students can then apply for a University Exemption Certificate from Higher Education South Africa (HESA).

3. Finally the American General Education Development (GED) is available on-line with 24/7 tutor help available or it can be studied via text books. It covers a group of five subjects and can be studied in 5 – 6 weeks, provided that the average student studies 5 – 6 hours a day. Once completed it is equivalent to the American Grade 12 exiting certificate. The Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SATs) are the American university or college entrance exams. There are two different exams one can take, SAT1 which is English and Math focused, or the SAT2 which is subject-specific. This is not a school leaving certificate but does hold weight with some institutions, particularly American universities and colleges who can issue candidates with suitable SATs results, a provisional letter of acceptance based on these results. The SATs can be practised on-line or with a book and DVD purchased and studied about 4 weeks prior to writing the exam. The exam takes place in designated test centres and embassies. Candidates pay on-line, book a date and then sit the exam on the specified date. These tests can be sat year round. Higher Education South Africa (HESA) are able to provide GED candidates with a University Exemption Certificate, if they can produce suitable GED results in conjunction with their SATs; or alternatively their GED results in conjunction with a letter of acceptance from an American university.

Both Cambridge and GED can only be written in English, whereas the NSC can be written in Afrikaans and English.

(c) What are the different costs, delivery methods and pedagogical and presentation styles of the various curriculum options available to home-schoolers?

As the survey shows, the modes of delivery and presentation of course material range from textbook based approaches, to mail dependant assignments and tests, to on-line presentations and programs, to DVD tutorials, to self-study or tutor dependant material. The costs and practicalities of these various modes of delivery range. The average costs incurred were around R8000 per annum. Some courses required as much as R22 000 per annum. There are also hidden costs such as textbooks, tutorials, teacher resources, materials for the subjects, Internet data, postage and import costs, taxes on imported books and the need for tutoring when it just becomes too difficult to go it alone. These costs vary too.

However, with the surge in Internet users, the advances in technology and the effluence of knowledge available at the touch of a button, access to free tutorials and any number of free aids is very helpful. Hence on-line and technology driven learning tools are highly favoured, if not as the primary source of input, certainly as a back-up or add-on to their curriculum. Many of these resources are free, such as the Kahn Academy.

Parent's experiences of their particular curriculum were as varied as the curriculum providers. Certain curriculum providers were widely viewed as rude, disorganised, unhelpful, un-qualified, unavailable and not able to keep delivery times on track, whether with support, marking or sending out books. On the other hand, many more parents were happy with their curriculum providers. There were glowing reports attributed to certain foreign curricula which offered resources free of charge and easily accessible on-line. Further, many parents felt their service providers were helpful, knowledgeable and reliable.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

In conclusion then, there are several methods for home-schoolers to acquire a recognised school leaver's certificate which will grant access to South African universities. However, these are limited, not always easy, practical or affordable.

Of concern is the fact that so many respondents admitted in their open-ended comments that they no longer have faith in the public education system. Whether this is indicative of just the home-schooling community's opinion or whether it is wider spread could also provoke further research enquiry. However, if the NSC is not the easiest option for them to choose as their exit exam, one must wonder why it is so difficult to access? Perhaps stipulated continuous assessments could be dropped for external candidates? Is the education department purposely trying to make it as difficult as possible for those who do not comply? This is another area which could be investigated.

Finally, it is clear that many parents are choosing to home-school and that globally the number of home-schoolers is reported to be growing (Brynard, 2007; Moore, Lemmer and Van Wyk, 2004; Sheffer and Farenga, 2004). This indicates, and is a strong recommendation, that alternatives to the usual Grade 12 exit certificates should be considered for outside candidates. There is a need for this and certainly the demand is there from amongst the South African home-school community. With plummeting school standards, high university drop out numbers and questionable benchmark performance in standardised testing when compared to international education (Brynard, 2007; Moore, Lemmer and Van Wyk, 2004) there certainly is just cause for serious focus on the implementation of South African University Entrance Exams such as the NBT. In addition, it is recommended that a South African version of the SATs for university entrance purposes is instituted.

Of further significance, is the fact that in South Africa, it is not just home-schoolers who often struggle to acquire a suitable certificate with which to gain tertiary entrance, but there are adult learners in the same predicament, who later in life need to acquire a grade 12 in order to be accommodated in tertiary institutions. They too face the same obstacles that home-schoolers do, in acquiring a Grade 12 certificate. There is certainly strong motivation for alternative South African university access routes to be made available.

In addition to these findings, policies in South Africa on Education need to be addressed. Government policies should be altered to accommodate alternative entry methods into tertiary institutions for home-schoolers and others, as previously recommended by e.g. Brynard (2007) and Cummings, Mawdley & De Waal (2006). There is certainly room for further investigation and research to be conducted, which may aid policy makers.

It was highlighted by Cummings, Mawdley & De Waal (2006, p. 59) regarding the need for clarity in our South African policy when it comes to the 'best interests' of the child. "...different interpretations, applications and conflicts regarding the standard of the best interests of the child in education... shows that further conceptualisation of the principle of best interests would be helpful. As noted in our South African analysis, is this about short-term, medium-term or long-term benefits?" It is important that consensus can be reached between Government policy and home-school parents regarding policy which clearly does have the best interests of every child at heart.

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8. APPENDIX:

Copy of online "Survey Monkey" questionnaire.