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**The Changing Face of Home Education in New Zealand:
Motivations and Challenges**

A thesis presented as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

A lack of research looking into home education in New Zealand was apparent. With this educational option more popular than ever, a need for research in this field was clear. A survey was conducted with 151 home educators within New Zealand to determine who was home educating, what motivates them to do so, and to identify any challenges they may face as a result. In addition to the survey, follow-up interviews were conducted with four of these participants to elaborate on their responses, providing a deeper understanding of the areas of interest. It was found that home educators were mainly female and commonly of New Zealand European descent. On average, they were educating between 1-2 children throughout multiple regions of New Zealand. The most frequent motivation for home educating was the ability to teach at a child's own pace and tailor to their requirements. Dissatisfaction with teaching in public schools was also common. The biggest challenge home educators faced was financial strain, followed by time management. Three themes were identified in the follow-up interviews regarding motivations for home education. These included: control over child's education, dissatisfaction with public schooling, and lifestyle factors. Three themes were also identified for challenges home educators faced. These were: judgment from others, financial strain, and lack of government support. Some aspects of who is home educating, motivations for doing so, and challenges faced as a result of this, remain unchanged over the years. Although, there was some evidence of shifts in these areas over the past decade. It is hoped the research will provide a more up to date understanding of home education in New Zealand in the current era. This will be useful for those considering home education, policymakers, teachers, and for the general public.

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The Changing Face of Home Education in New Zealand:

Motivations and Challenges

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Background information on this study is provided in this initial chapter. Section 1.2 begins with an overview of home education in New Zealand and highlights the lack of research regarding this educational alternative. The aim of the study is to update and build on existing research which will be explained in section 1.3. It is beneficial for researchers to provide some background information about themselves to disclose their reasons for the interest in a study and factors that influenced this (Tuckman & Harper, 2012). Thus, in section 1.4, some information on the researcher will be provided. Section 1.5 will attempt to define home education as definitions can vary among home educators and globally. Finally, section 1.6 will give a summary of the history of home education in New Zealand. A conclusion of the chapter ends this chapter in section 1.7.

1.2 Context

While the bulk of students in New Zealand are educated in a public school setting, a small proportion are home educated (Education Counts, 2020). To home educate in New Zealand, a parent or guardian must complete an application form outlining how they intend to educate their child at home and send it to the Ministry of Education to assess. If they are approved, a Certificate of Exemption is issued to that parent, giving them permission to teach their child at home as opposed to enrolling them in a school (Ministry of Education, 2020). If approved, the parent becomes primarily responsible for providing their child's education. The practice of home education has often been the subject of debate. Advocates of home education refer to benefits such as: individualised learning, freedom, flexibility, and strong

family connections (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). By contrast, critics argue home education can cause socialisation issues and that home educated children may not be taught as well as they would in a traditional school (Dwyer & Peters, 2019). It should be noted, multiple studies have found home educated children to be just as well socialised and have similar levels of academic achievement, sometimes higher, than publicly schooled children (Carlson, 2020; Cogan, 2010; Ray, 2010).

Choosing home education over mainstream schooling is a growing trend in New Zealand. In fact, it is at its highest prevalence in history, with the most recent statistics showing 6,573 children are being home educated in New Zealand (Education Counts, 2020). This upward trend has also been seen internationally in countries such as the United States, Canada, South Africa, and Australia. Due to this increase, researchers are becoming more interested in the field of home education. That is, historically it has typically been a very under researched topic (Tan, 2020). What is contributing to parents electing this educational alternative over traditional schools? Recent international research suggests there are diverse reasons for this ranging from concern over school environments to freedom of choice (Neuman, 2020). However, in New Zealand specifically, factors influencing this trend are unknown due to a lack of up to date research in this field.

1.3 Aim of the Study

There is clearly a need for updated research in New Zealand regarding who is educating their children at home and motivations behind their decision. Without investigating this, understanding the reasons for the upward trend toward this educational alternative is unknown. Furthermore, there is barely existent research exploring potential challenges home educators face as a result of their choice. This is an issue as it is unknown how home educators are managing or whether they are being supported effectively.

This research aims to fill in the gaps identified by providing up-to-date information in these areas. It is possible motivations for home education may have shifted since previous research was conducted in New Zealand a decade ago. Any shift in motivation could also be influenced by who is home educating in the current era such as whether demographics or educators' backgrounds and philosophies may have shifted at all. This is important to know as the home education numbers continue to increase. Recent international research in Western countries has indeed found some shifts in who is home educating their children and their motivation for home education (Gaither, 2017). For example, while home education was often driven by religious motivations, other primary motivations have become more prominent such as a dissatisfaction with school environments (Gaither, 2017). Therefore, seeing some shift internationally as they too see home education numbers surge, it would be interesting to discover whether this trend is also evident in New Zealand. Exploring possible challenges will also be useful, such as by providing more understanding of the most effective ways to support home educators in the current day if found to be necessary. Importantly, this research will provide a nationwide insight into these areas of home education, considering previous research has focused solely on the North Island. Overall, gaining more understanding of this growing educational trend will help inform the general public, those considering home education, mainstream educators, and policymakers.

1.4 Researcher Background

I began studying psychology in my early twenties and developed a keen interest in certain topics such as developmental and educational psychology. Hence, once I completed my psychology degree, I began further study in education at a postgraduate level. It was during this time, I became more familiar with home education, which was beginning to appeal to me. Of course, having two young children of primary school age, learning more about benefits or drawbacks of different educational options was always valuable. My two

children were in public school for the first year or two of primary before I made the decision to begin teaching them from home. There were multiple motivations for making this decision, however, the primary reason was to be able to provide my children with one-on-one education. The main motivation for pursuing this research is to help provide a more adequate understanding of home education, reasons people choose to do it, and challenges that can arise for this group of educators. With such little research on home education, considering its growth in popularity, it seems necessary to provide this understanding.

1.5 Home Education Definition

To define home education is not a simple task due to the differences in the way home educating families refer to their educational approach. Some refer to it as homeschooling, while others strongly dislike this label, preferring home education as they feel they are not “schooling” their child, but “educating” them (Maranto & Bell, 2018). There are some vast differences in the home education style used among parents. For example, some choose an “unschooling” approach, whereby education is led by the child as opposed to the other end of the scale where a home educator takes on a more traditional teacher role as would be seen in a public school (O’Hare & Coyne, 2019). However, taking into account the different terms used, home education is loosely defined by the Ministry of Education (2020) in New Zealand as: “where parents or legal guardians take responsibility for the education of their children, instead of enrolling them in school”.

1.6 The History of Home Education

Before public schooling began, home education was predominant in New Zealand. Children would learn about the world from those around them, their parents, their siblings, friends, or other significant others in their life (Cumming & Cumming, 1997). However, in 1877, an Education Act was passed in New Zealand making it compulsory for all primary-

aged Pakeha children, and Māori if their family wished, to attend school. However, the act did include that a child could be exempt from attending a school under certain situations. If the school committees and headmasters felt satisfied the child would be taught as regularly and as well as at a registered school, parents could receive an exemption certificate. During this era, compulsory schooling was harder to implement than imagined as there were not enough schools or teachers to meet the demand. Hence, home education was still occurring, although as records of exemptions were not recorded, exact figures are not known. Later in 1922, the Correspondence School began which provided curriculum to children at home under the guidance of their parents. By the 1960's attendance at registered schools became common. The new normal was being educated in a public school. However, there has been a rise in home education since the 1980's. During 1996, the Ministry of Education began visiting home educating families and reviewing their education practices. However, in the current day, reviews are only carried on the basis of a complaint. In addition to the continued exemption process in place today, a declaration must be signed twice a year stating that the home educator has been teaching their child over the last six months as well and as regularly as a public school. Attached to this declaration is the option to receive a supervisory allowance if they wish (NCHENZ, 2020). The continued growth can be seen in the figure below displaying the recent home education figures, between the years 1998-2019.

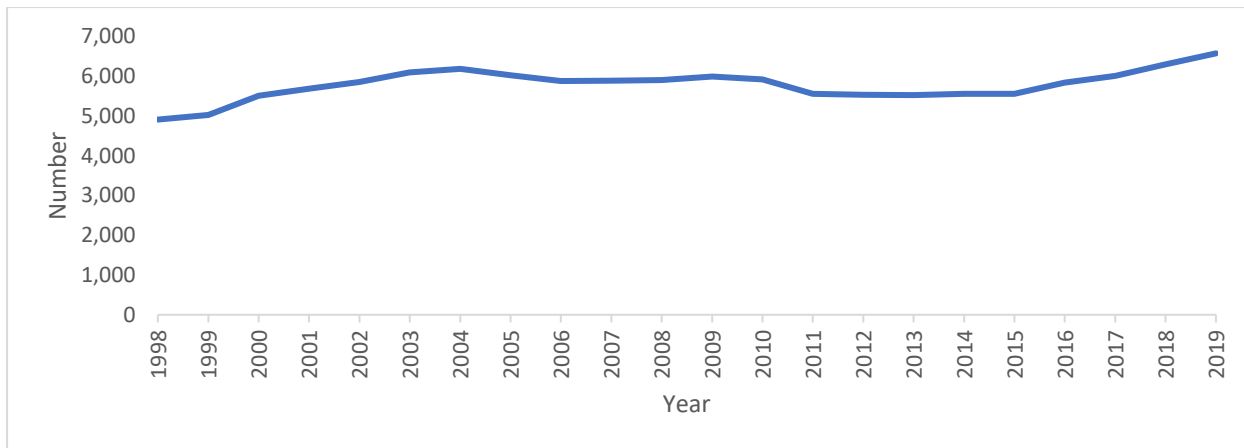


Figure 1. *Home Education Numbers Between 1998-2019* (Education Counts, 2020).

Home education numbers were sitting at 4,909 in 1998. The most recent number from 2019 shows there are 6,573 children being home educated. This is likely to increase for the year 2020 with the impact of Covid-19 contributing to the rise of opting to educate at home.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided information on the background of this study. It explained that home education is growing in popularity in New Zealand, yet there is little research explaining the trend. The aim of the study was described as understanding this educational alternative by investigating who is home educating, their motivations for doing so, and to identify any unique challenges they face as a result. The researcher's background was explained and how the interest in this topic was sparked by previous psychology study. A definition of home education was also given with a discussion of how there is some debate regarding this. There was also an overview of the history of home education in New Zealand, explaining that in terms of history, public schooling is actually a reasonably new approach to education.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

Home education research is very minimal in New Zealand, with the most recent literature regarding the areas of interest for this study being over 10 years old. Despite its age, it is still relevant to review considering its New Zealand context. Particularly with the latest home education statistics showing numbers are higher than they have ever been (Education Counts, 2020). Although, it is important to reiterate that motivations and challenges for home education may have shifted in the last decade. To show the need for up-to-date research in this area of home education, in addition to the review of literature in New Zealand, more recent international literature regarding home education will also be included. Australian literature was considered useful considering some commonalities it shares with New Zealand in comparison to other countries. Literature will also be reviewed from the United States. This international literature reviewed shows some shifts over time in the three areas of interest relevant for the aims of this study. Therefore, where relevant, earlier studies will be briefly referred to before reviewing more recent literature to illustrate changes.

The literature review will begin by looking at the literature regarding “who” is home educating in section 1.2. Following this is a review of motivations parents have had for choosing to home educate in section 1.3. In addition, literature regarding challenges home educators have faced as a result of this educational choice will be reviewed in section 1.4. The chapter ends with a conclusion of the literature review in section 1.5.

1.2 Who is Home Educating?

New Zealand Context

Early research into home education in New Zealand was carried out by Kerslake, Murrow, and Lange (1998). They conducted a Ministry of Education survey involving 725

New Zealand families. Participants were either in the process of home educating or had recently been home educating. It focused on reasons behind their choice and methods used for teaching in the home. Unfortunately, the survey response was only 44%, potentially due to a concern from home educators regarding how their data could be used by the government in a negative way. Therefore, findings were not generalisable to the home educating families in New Zealand at that time. Nevertheless, Kerslake et al.'s (1998) study does provide some valuable data regarding home education of that era useful for the current study. In terms of who home educators were in New Zealand, Kerslake et al. (1998) found home educating parents were primarily mothers with the mean number of children educated in a household being 1.9. Further demographic information was not included in the report, therefore ethnicity and so forth are unknown.

Roache's (2009) New Zealand study was conducted ten years after Kerslake et al. (1998). Similarly, he investigated parental motivations for home education and practices used. Reflecting on Kerslake et al.'s (1998) disappointing survey response, Roache (2009) claimed a qualitative study would be more suitable to gain a more thorough insight into home education in New Zealand. Therefore, he conducted eight interviews with home educating families within the North Island of New Zealand. Some children in Roache's study had been in a public school before home education, while others were home educated their whole lives. Roache (2009) adopted a narrative inquiry approach with elements of grounded theory incorporated.

Roache's (2009) research collected some background information on his participants. It aligned with Kerslake et al. (1998) in the way mothers continued to be primarily responsible for home educating their children. However, the average number of home educated children per family was three. Furthermore, it was found most of his participants held postgraduate qualifications. While this is interesting, it is one potential limitation of his

study in terms of being generalisable to the entire home education population of New Zealand. Research suggests educated individuals are more likely to volunteer in a study than non-volunteers (Salkind, 2010). Roache's (2009) participants came from a broad range of backgrounds. For example, both traditional two-parent families as well as solo home educating families and those from varying cultures. This shows there was some diversity among home educators in New Zealand. However, as Roache only had eight participants, these demographics may have varied greatly amongst the broader home educating community nationwide.

International Context

Before discussing the more recent research into who is home educating in Australia, a review of who was home educating in the past seems necessary. Allan and Jackson's (2010) research provided a summary of Australian home education. Like most literature regarding who is home educating, they found the mother to be primarily in this role. Furthermore, formal qualifications of home educators were uncommon; despite this, negative implications on the educational outcomes of these home educated children had not been found. Of what was known at the time, very few home educators were solo parents and most lived off the income of their husband or partner in order to fulfil their role as educator.

Slater, Burton and McKillop (2020) further looked into home education in Australia with their investigation into who is choosing this educational alternative and why. They recruited 385 home educating parents in Australia to take part in a questionnaire which collected both demographic data and reasons behind their educational choice. A total of 87.7% of home educators were aged between 31-50 years old. Consistent with most literature, the mother was still the main educator. However, unlike earlier Australian research, over half of participants had a degree or higher educational qualification (Allan & Jackson,

2010). This highlights some change over the decade in terms of the educational level of home educators. Furthermore, the majority of parents were most commonly educating 1 or 2 children. In terms of where home educating families lived, there was a variety of city, suburban, and rural locations. They were also most likely to be single income families as was seen in Allan and Jackson's (2010) research.

While Slater et al. (2020) found some small changes in who is home educating in Australia, recent research in the United States also shows some shift (Gaither, 2017; Hirsh, 2019). Jolly and Matthews (2020) provided a useful insight into this. They explain, in 1998, home educators were typically described as white mothers with religious beliefs who were usually wealthier than average families. They also commonly had a husband who was often a minister. However, there is some shift in the current day in terms of people of colour or those from a non-religious background also choosing home education as an option. However, the mother still remains the primary home educator (Jolly & Matthews, 2020).

While there are still predominantly white families home educating in the US, there has more recently been a consistent growth of parents of colour opting for home education over public schooling (Hirsh, 2019). The main reasons for this have been found to be concern over a lack of opportunity for their children in the public school setting compared to white children. Racism was also found to be a motivation for beginning home education. Hirsh (2019) also highlighted emerging research suggesting that LGBT families are beginning to choose this educational alternative. Families home educating in the current era ranged from those at the less wealthy end of the scale through to the more affluent families. This is in contrast to the earlier research regarding who historically home educated in the United States where those in a better financial situation than most were most likely to home educate (Jolly & Mathews, 2020). It is clear looking at these two pieces of research, there is some movement away from solely traditional white religious families from affluent backgrounds.

1.3 Motivations for Home Educating

New Zealand Context

In Kerslake et al.'s (1998) study, some motivations for home education were identified. Primary motivations were categorised as follows: Concerns over negative social influences in schools, belief they could educate better, and being dissatisfied with the school system or teachers. There was also a smaller proportion of respondents who were said to be motivated by religious reasons, health needs of their child, or special needs. Due to the low response rate and potentially, concerns over how the data would be used by the Ministry of Education, Kerslake et al.'s (1998) was likely overrepresented by a specific type of home educator and may not accurately represent the entire home school population of that time. Thus, the data can not be generalised. Furthermore, the survey approach used did not allow home educators to expand on their reasons behind their choices, therefore gaining an insight into their motivations is difficult. However, it does provide some overview of motivations that existed during the era.

Roache's (2009) study also looked at reasons for home education. As highlighted in Kerslake et al.'s (1998) research, the survey approach did not provide understanding of motivations beyond the numerical data. By contrast, Roache's (2009) approach using interviews was able to gain valuable insight into why parents were home educating. Motivations for home education were found to be complex and often multifaceted. Each family interviewed had different reasons for choosing to home educate, although there were some common themes identified. An initial theme was being in control of their children's education. This was not just in terms of their education, but control of their social and moral learning was also considered an important factor. Participants had strong opinions about how their children should be raised, in terms of their development and how they should be

educated. There was some concern regarding the school environment and most felt learning in a family environment where they could control what they are taught and how they were taught was the most beneficial for their children. Another theme identified as a motivation for home education was religious or philosophical beliefs, moral and lifestyle choices. This included a desire from some participants to have cultural beliefs woven into their children's learning. Others also had strong religious beliefs which they felt was essential to incorporate into their child's education. There was some consensus among families regarding concern over school values, practices of teachers (e.g., bullying concerns), and negative influence of peer groups in the school environment. Concepts of their family and family rights was a third theme identified. Participants felt their family was strengthened and more unified as a result of home education. Family values and morals were taught in the home and the child was seen as being able to grow up with these shaping who they are in their adult life. A fourth theme identified for motivations was the belief of protecting childhood. Generally, this related to a belief that the demands of a school such as school hours, timetables, or extra homework, was depriving them of a childhood. They felt children need a more flexible education where they have the time to enjoy it through exploration and discovery of the world around them. Concerns arising from personal school experience was a fifth theme found in Roache's study. The influence of personal experiences was a motivating factor for both parents who had always home educated as well as those who took their children out of school. Some had experiences from their own childhood where they themselves had been the victim of bullying or had seen a sibling experience it, either by teachers or other students. One participant reflected on this bullying in childhood and going on to witness it later in life as a teacher. Others reflected on being ignored by the school regarding the needs of their child and a belief they could educate their child better. A final theme identified that motivated parents to home educate was cultural preservation. This related to anxiety from two families, one Māori and

one immigrant, over a loss of culture if their child attended a public school which they felt they could preserve in the home through their teachings. An interesting finding was how initial motivations for home education changed once they began educating in the home.

International Context

Slater et al.'s (2020) study, reported that the first rise in home education in Australia began in the 1960's due to criticism from educational reformers regarding the education system of that era. In the past, examples of typical motivations for choosing this education option were related to religious beliefs, moral beliefs, or distance from schools (Kunzman, 2009; Varnham, 2008). As home education continues to rise in the current day, further research into motivations has been carried out to provide updated understanding of this trend in Australia. One frequent motivation found was being able to look after the social and emotional wellbeing needs of their child in a way they felt a public school could not. Of the sample, 22% of home educated children had one or more diagnosed mental health disorders that was a motivating factor for choosing home education over a public school. Bullying within schools was another influential factor contributing to parents opting for home education, with 30.7% of participants referring to this. Developmental differences that require accommodations such as having a child who is gifted or has specific learning disorder were also reasons for home education, with 33% of the sample having some type of developmental difference. There was also some concern regarding curriculum and standards in schools. For example, some parents had concerns their child was underachieving and could not keep up with the standards, while others felt their child was working at a level lower than they were capable of. This dissatisfaction directly led to their decision to home educate their children in order to meet their specific needs. Finally, a smaller number of participants referred to life circumstances as a motivating factor such as religious beliefs or distance from schools. There is some change in what dominantly motivates parents in Australia according to this study. It

seems there are less parents choosing this education option for religious reasons or due to distance from schools. These findings are also in contrast to the New Zealand literature where reasons such as developmental differences or mental health needs were not significantly reported (Kerslake et al., 1998; Roache, 2009). Most prominent in Slater et al.'s (2020) study, was the view that schools could not meet their children's needs in terms of social or emotional wellbeing, educational needs, and concerns over the school environment such as bullying. This indicates that dissatisfaction in how public schools operate has increased for some parents over time in Australia.

Motivations for home education in the United States have been reported as primarily due to a parent's belief they could provide their child with a better education at home and for religious reasons (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). However, reflective of other recent literature into home education motivations, while still prominent, religious motives are subsiding (Gaither, 2017). Home educating parents in the United States have recently cited additional motivating factors such as concerns over school environment or special needs (Gaither, 2017). Another increasing motivation was found to be concerns over cultural or ethnic inequality in public schools, contributing to a significant growth of African-American or Hispanic parents opting to home educate their children to provide more positive educational outcomes for their children (Dennison, Lasser, Awtry Madres, & Lerma, 2020). Similar to Roache's (2009) study, recent research from the United States has found that initial motivations for home education typically change or expand once parents begin educating for some time (Gaither, 2017).

1.4 Challenges of Home Education

New Zealand Context

Kerslake et al. (1998) identified some common challenges home educating families felt they faced when asking participants to name disadvantages of their educational choice. For example, demand on the parent and a lack of support in terms of resources or financial assistance. It would be interesting to understand the demands these parents felt they faced and ways in which a lack of resources and funding were causing issues.

Like Kerslake et al.'s (1998) study, challenges identified in Roache's (2009) research related to lack of access to resources in comparison to mainstream schools. However, Roache's (2009) interview approach allowed for understanding of how these issues were challenging parents. There were some participants who were in a better position to find resources as they were friends with teachers who would share what they needed. However, they pointed out that other home educators would likely have more of a challenge to find what they require. Others confirmed that extra resources would be greatly appreciated. There was some desire for access to chemistry labs in schools, for example, whereby their child could come in and use their resources when not in use. The argument was made that their taxes had contributed to these school funded resources, therefore access to them when not in use should not be a hard ask. It was proposed teachers can show some negativity towards home educators, making it more difficult to access these types of resources or be able to discuss resource ideas with them. Unlike Kerslake et al.'s (1998) findings, funding was not a challenge mentioned. However, one participant did express feeling grateful for getting any funding at all and how they felt an increase was unnecessary. This is interesting considering the funding had not increased over that ten-year period. Although, due to the small number of participants and lack of information regarding their financial situation, it is difficult to know if a lack of concern over financial support was shared by all home education families. Roache also made the suggestion that concerns over new harsher regulations on home education may have influenced participants' decisions not to mention this. Considering funding remains at

the same level in 2020, it would be interesting to know whether this a challenge that exists in the current day. Likewise, it would be valuable to know whether access to resources for home educating families has improved in the last decade.

International Context

There is limited international research that looks at potential challenges faced as a result of home education. Although Slater et al. (2020) did identify some in his Australian study. It should be mentioned that Australian home educators are not eligible for financial support in the same way New Zealanders are. However, a desire for funding and resources was mentioned as a challenge for home educating parents in Australia. They felt as though there was inequity between public schools and home educators (Slater et al. 2020).

There is some research regarding challenges of home education in the United States. For instance, Hauseman (2011) conducted a study looking into negative perceptions and stereotyping of home education in film and television programmes. It was found that home educators were often depicted as paranoid and overprotective and their children were labelled as “nerds” or “know-it-alls.” It was suggested that viewing these inauthentic portrayals of home educating families leads to a negative perception towards them from the general public. More recent research suggests that negative perceptions towards home education and stereotyping remains a challenge for some home educating families (Watson, 2019).

Stress caused by taking on multiple roles in the family due to home educating has also been identified as a challenge internationally (Gaither, 2017; Stevens, 2001). Home educators are typically mothers. It has been found that mothers taking on this additional home educator role can experience stress regarding juggling their responsibilities they feel they have as a mother (e.g., household chores) alongside teaching their children, often having a lack of personal time for themselves (Gaither, 2017; Stevens, 2001).

1.5 Conclusion

New Zealand and international literature regarding home education was reviewed in this chapter. It first discussed who was home educating. With the limited demographic data provided, Kerslake et al., (1998) found that home educators were mostly mothers educating 1.9 children on average. Like Kerslake et al. (1998), Roache also found mothers were typically educating, however three children was the average number being taught. He also found that his participants tended to have a high educational level. When reviewing the international research on who is home educating, there was some shift in demographics such as financial status, ethnicity, educational levels, and religious beliefs. However, there was some consistency such as mothers primarily educating their children. The review of what motivates parents to home educate showed there was a large variety of reasons for this both in New Zealand and internationally. While some motivations were common and consistent over time between studies, there were some shifts evident such as a drop in religious reasons for home education. It was also common for parents' initial motivations to change once they began home education. Furthermore, there was some limited literature which referred to some challenges faced by home educators such as a lack of funding and resources in New Zealand. Internationally, funding was also a challenge in Australia, while negative perceptions of home education was considered challenging in the United States. It is true research into home education in New Zealand has provided some understanding. However, the work has struggled with generalisability and it clearly needs updating to ensure it reflects the home educating community of today. It would also be useful to compare the international literature with the current study to determine whether any trends seen internationally are also occurring in New Zealand.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

1.1 Introduction

Section 1.2 includes the research questions used for this study and provides the reasons behind them. The survey approach used by Kerslake et al. (1998) would have been useful to gain a large amount of numerical data on home educators in New Zealand if it had a stronger response rate. Nevertheless, surveys are limited in the way they do not allow for individuality of participants or in-depth knowledge in the way a qualitative method would. Unlike Kerslake et al.'s (1998) research, Roache's (2009) study provided more personal insights into home educating families in New Zealand, however, was not generalisable to the wider home educating community. Combining the two approaches with a mixed method design seemed a logical choice for this study which will be rationalised and explained further in section 1.3. Following this, section 1.4 describes the quantitative data collection method which was an online survey. Data collection methods for the qualitative phase by way of semi-structured interviews are detailed in section 1.5. These collection method sections also address the considerations which were made to ensure methods were trustworthy. In addition, section 1.6 explains the participant selection process. An explanation of the collection process and for each phase is provided in section 1.7 and 1.8. This involved use of the Survey Monkey website for quantitative collection and audio recording interviews via Zoom for qualitative collection. Following this, section 1.9 and 1.10 describe the data analysis process for both phases. It explains the quantitative data was analysed using Microsoft Excel, while the qualitative data involved thematic analysis. The chapter will also describe ethical considerations in section 1.11. Finally, a conclusion of the chapter will be included in section 1.12.

1.2 Research Questions

The researcher aimed to investigate who is educating their children at home in New Zealand, their motivations for doing this, and identify any challenges they may face. Therefore, three research questions were developed to help discover this. These questions reflect the nature of a mixed method approach. While the research aimed to identify who is home educating, motivating factors and challenges through the quantitative data, it also sought to explain these in more detail by way of collecting the more probing qualitative data. Therefore, the “what” parts of the questions relate to the quantitative phase of the research, while the “how” parts align with the qualitative phase. The main question the research sought to answer was: What does home education in New Zealand look like in 2020? To answer this, the following questions were developed:

- Who is home educating their children in New Zealand?
- What are the motivating factors for some parents choosing to home educate their children over placing them in a mainstream school?
- What unique challenges do home educating parents face as a result of their decision to home educate, if any, and how do they describe this?

1.3 Mixed Methods Approach

For the current study, it seemed important to build from the previous New Zealand research by adopting a mixed method approach. A mixed method research design involves using both quantitative and qualitative methods within a single study (McKim, 2017). The aim of adopting a mixed method approach is to provide depth and breadth. This research method offers the ability to gain broader numerical data from quantitative measures, while also potentially uncovering the underlying reasons behind them through further qualitative investigation (Turner, Cardinal, & Burton, 2017). Therefore, using this method for the current study allowed the researcher to collect quantitative data from a larger number of home

educators and follow it up with a qualitative investigation with a smaller number of home educators. The type of mixed method approach used for this research was sequential explanatory design (Cresswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2016). Once the quantitative data was collected, the researcher aimed to interpret or understand that data more effectively through additional qualitative investigation. This method has been found to be beneficial for making sense of quantitative data through elaboration by qualitative measures (Bowen, Rose, & Pilkington, 2017). It is a useful method for this study as it can provide up to date data on home education in New Zealand on a broader scale, while also expanding on this understanding through follow-up qualitative methods.

1.4 Quantitative Phase

Phase one of the research used quantitative measures to determine who home educators were, parental motivations for home educating, and any challenges they may have faced. Specifically, a survey design was adopted, which involves listing a series of questions and collecting data from participant responses to the questions (Ponto, 2015). The benefit of using an online survey method for the current study was its ability to collect data from a large population of home educators from throughout different regions of New Zealand reasonably quickly and at minimal cost (Walliman, 2017). There are however drawbacks to the survey approach. For instance, it does not provide understanding beyond the numbers. Nevertheless, this issue can be addressed by the follow-up interviews.

1.5 Qualitative Phase

Phase two of the research involved follow-up semi-structured interviews. The aim of this was to elaborate on the numerical data collected in phase one. Semi-structured interviews differ from structured interviews, which follow a strict answer and question format, in the way the interviewer has some questions in mind beforehand, but allows the interview to stray

in different directions where relevant, potentially developing more questions as it progresses (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2020). This interview method was beneficial for this study as it gave the participants the freedom to speak openly about their experiences without being restricted by structured questions (Morse, 2016) This ensures the data collected from the interviews is more meaningful and credible (Ramlo, 2020). However, these interviews and their analysis can be time consuming, thus, it is difficult to gain data from a large number of participants as would be possible with quantitative measures. Although, in the current study, the aim of the follow up research was to elaborate on the already collected numerical data, therefore insight was the primary aim over numbers.

1.6 Participant Selection Process

Previous research was difficult to generalise to home educating families nationwide considering it focused solely on a small number of families based in the North Island (Roache, 2009). Thus, including participants from all geographical areas of New Zealand was important, particularly considering the reasonably high volume of home educating families in regions such as Canterbury (Education Counts, 2020). A web link from SurveyMonkey inviting home educating parents with a home education exemption to participate in the survey was posted in four relevant Facebook groups focused on home education within New Zealand.¹ Most of these groups had between 2000-4000 members. It was suspected many were likely members of multiple groups and some may not have held an exemption. However, the numbers were around the same as the population of home educating families within New Zealand which was last recorded at 3,597. Therefore, it seemed a logical means of sourcing participants, particularly as the research is nationwide. In addition to social media recruiting, snowballing sampling was also used to ensure home educating families without

¹ NCHENZ, Home education in NZ, Homeschooled NZ, Homeschool New Zealand

social media were not excluded. The online survey received 151 responses from home educating parents in New Zealand.

Following on from the quantitative phase, the researcher invited participants who had expressed their interest, to take part in follow-up interviews. Interest was expressed by leaving their name and email address at the conclusion of the survey. They were informed that their surveys would not remain anonymous to myself by leaving their name and email. However, the surveys were anonymous to anyone else, and pseudonyms would be used for interviews to ensure anonymity. Two home educating families were selected from the North Island, and a further two from the South Island to ensure both islands were included. They were also selected based on differing motivations and challenges to get a broader understanding of these areas as opposed to just focusing on one or two criteria. It should also be mentioned that all home educators interviewed had previously had at least one of their children in public schools prior to home educating.

1.7 Quantitative Data Collection: Survey

A survey was developed using Survey Monkey, using multiple choice questions relating to the areas of interest, ensuring an “other” box was included alongside the categories where relevant. Some of the multiple questions required a single selection option. Although where relevant, participants were able to select more than one option. The first page was an information sheet providing background information on the study, how the data would be used, and a reminder they could withdraw from the study up until the submission of the final report. Participants were also invited to take part in follow-up interviews, for the qualitative phase, and asked to leave their name and email addresses if they were interested at the conclusion of the survey. It was explained that completion and submission of the survey implied their consent to participate in this first phase of the research. The first section of the

survey collected demographic information such as: age, gender, location, ethnicity, and education level, as these types of demographics were of interest to understand who the home educators were. The second section focused on motivations behind their decision to home educate. For example, selection of their primary motivation, any other motivations contributing to their decision, and whether any primary motivations changed along the way or any new ones emerged. The final section asked about potential challenges as a result of their home education decision. It was originally asked if any challenges have been experienced since home educating. If so, participants could select their biggest challenge, while also indicating any other challenges they may have faced in addition to this. After the completion of the survey questions, there was a page thanking them and an option to leave their name and email address should they want to participate in a follow-up interview.

1.8 Qualitative Data Collection: Semi-structured Interviews

Phase two of the research used semi-structured interviews. These interviews were held using Zoom video conferencing software and audio recorded. The rationale for using Zoom was that it would not have been practical to travel to the four locations outside of the researcher's region to conduct face-to-face interviews. Moreover, New Zealand was currently under a level 4 lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic and travel was restricted. Zoom is a useful alternative to face-to-face interviews (Gray, Wong-Wylie, Rempel, & Cook, 2020). For example, each party can still see one another, gain rapport, personal connection, and pick up on non-verbal cues in a way a non-visual medium such as a telephone cannot offer (Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey, & Lawless, 2019). Nevertheless, the option of a phone call was offered if the use of this software was not accessible to participants or they felt more comfortable with a phone interview. Interviews lasted between 15 to 40 minutes. Any further demographic information not included in the original surveys completed was collected initially to contribute towards understanding who the home educators were. Questions often

asked participants for elaboration or clarification relating to their previous online survey responses. These questions were open-ended, guiding the conversation in the direction required, yet allowing the participant flexibility to speak freely about the topics of interest. Open-ended probing questions were useful to develop further insight into the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of the participant required for the research aims. It was important at times to revert back to the research questions to avoid going off track as the interviews progressed. All interviews were successfully recorded and transcribed manually at a later time. Furthermore, transcripts were e-mailed to participants for verification and to ensure accuracy. They were encouraged to highlight where editing may need to occur; however, the transcripts remained the same for each participant following their reviews.

1.9 Quantitative Data Analysis

Raw data from the survey responses were exported from SurveyMonkey and opened in Microsoft Excel worksheet for analysis. Each variable for demographics, motivations, and challenges were input separately. Variables were analysed individually on separate worksheets. Total number of responses for each category were tallied and percentages calculated. The percentages were then written up as frequency tables in descending order.

1.10 Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview transcripts. Thematic analysis is a popularly used method for analysing qualitative data, typically texts, and involves identifying patterns of meaning in the data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). A common method used, which was adopted for this study, is Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. Phase one involves familiarising oneself with the data, followed by generating potential codes in phase two. Once initial codes are developed, they are collated into possible themes in phase three. These themes are then reviewed to ensure they accurately reflect the

dataset in phase four. Once this is confirmed, themes are further defined and named during phase five. Finally, phase six involves producing the report which involves presenting and interpreting results from data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was considered the most useful method for analysing the data from transcripts in this study due to the way it can help provide understanding of the participants' experiences across the data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

Interviews were transcribed manually, which involved listening to the audio recordings and typing them into a word format on the computer. This was both to ensure accuracy and to gain familiarity with the data. Once participants indicated they were satisfied with the transcripts, thematic analysis of the interview data was conducted to identify common themes and patterns. Coding was carried in an inductive manner, whereby the data collected directed the development of themes. Initially, the transcripts were read several times in order to become familiar with the participants' responses and identify any emerging patterns. Once the data were familiar, labels were added and categorised showing where patterns occurred. These initial codes were then collated into overarching themes which may have potentially explained the meaning behind the data. These themes were reviewed to ensure they supported the data and then further defined. The meaning and focus of each theme were determined and they were named. After working through the data, three final themes were identified each for motivations and challenges. Motivation themes included: control of child's education, dissatisfaction with public schooling, and lifestyle factors. Challenge themes were as follows: judgment from others, financial strain, and lack of government support. These themes were discussed with participants to ensure correct interpretation of their responses which was confirmed by all. Finally, these themes were written into the final report explaining the story they told. The methods undertaken to

perform this thematic analysis are in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis.

1.11 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research, the Massey University (2017): Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants was complied with to ensure it was conducted in a responsible manner. The research conducted was considered low risk. Key ethical considerations included: anonymity and informed consent.

To ensure anonymity, participants names or other identifying information were not required in the surveys unless they wished to take part in follow-up interviews. Furthermore, those who participated in the follow-up interviews were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. Interviewees were informed that recordings and transcriptions would be kept in a secure folder and destroyed after the research was complete.

To address the ethical issue of informed consent, surveys included an information sheet explaining the process, how the participants' information would be used, and indicated that by beginning the survey they consent to taking part in the research. In regard to the interviews, participants received an email explaining the process, how their information would be used, and that they could choose to decline to participate if they wished. If participants agreed to participate, an informed consent form was sent, which was signed by all participants. Before the interview began, participants were reminded they could choose not to answer any question or leave the interview at any time. The research was also ethical in the way interviewees were given the opportunity to read over the transcripts and confirm they were satisfied with these. Once this occurred, participants gave consent to use the approved transcripts for the purpose of this study.

1.12 Conclusion

This chapter has explained the rationale for the mixed method approach used in this study. It explained this would be beneficial to provide larger numerical data but could also provide insight behind the numbers. The quantitative phase using a survey was outlined, followed by an explanation of the qualitative phase using semi-structured interviews with consideration of why and how these methods would be most suitable. Participant selection by way of recruiting volunteers using a social media platform was also discussed. Furthermore, data collection processes for each phase were explained. SurveyMonkey was used to collect responses from volunteers from relevant Facebook groups for the quantitative phase, while audio recordings of Zoom interviews, later transcribed, was used for the qualitative phase. Data analysis for the survey responses using Microsoft Excel was explained. In addition, it detailed the transcribing procedure for interviews and the six steps used for thematic analysis. Finally, ethical considerations made throughout the study such as anonymity and informed consent were described.

CHAPTER FOUR: Findings

1.1 Introduction

Results from the quantitative and qualitative research phases will be presented in this chapter. The survey results will be provided first followed by the interview findings. These results are organised logically in order of the original research questions. An overview of the quantitative results from the survey is provided in section 1.2. Section 1.3 presents the results of who was home educating. Motivations for home educating follows in section 1.4, and any challenges identified as a result of home educating are presented in section 1.5. An overview of the qualitative results from the interviews is provided in section 1.6. Participant profiles are included before the presentation of qualitative results in section 1.7 to provide some background on interviewees. Section 1.8 shows the results regarding motivations for home education, while the results of challenges faced due to home educating are provided in section 1.9. A conclusion of the results chapter follows in section 1.10.

1.2 Quantitative Results Overview

Data from the online surveys was analysed in Microsoft Excel. Results for individual questions were compiled and percentages calculated. Results were written up as frequency tables in descending order to highlight any significant trends in the data.

1.3 Who is Home Educating?

Table 1 presents the results of the demographic questions. It shows that the majority of respondents were female (98.67%), while just 1.33% were male. It also shows that the 35-44 age group was most common, followed closely by the 45-54 age group. No home educating parents were under 24, while a smaller number were within the remaining age groups. Furthermore, most participants were of New Zealand European descent. Auckland was the most common region participants lived in. However, Christchurch had a reasonably

high percentage when compared with other regions. It was also found that 77.48% of parents home educated 1-2 children. Finally, a significant number of parents had a Bachelor's degree or higher qualifications.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

Demographic Variables	Percentage
Gender	
Female	98.67%
Male	1.33%
Other	0.00%
Age Group	
18-24	0.00%
25-34	12.58%
35-44	47.68%
45-54	35.76%
55-64	3.31%
65+	0.66%
Ethnicity	
NZ European	84.11%
Māori	1.99%
Pasifika	0.66%
Asian	1.99%
Other	11.26%
Region of NZ	
Northland	3.31%
Auckland	21.85%
Waikato	14.57%
Bay of Plenty	6.62%

Gisborne	1.32%
Hawke's Bay	3.31%
Taranaki	1.32%
Manawatu-Whanganui	5.96%
Wellington	4.64%
Tasman	2.65%
Marlborough	2.65%
West Coast	0.66%
Canterbury	18.54%
Otago	6.62%
Other	0.00%

No. of Children Currently Home Educating

1	38.41%
2	39.07%
3	14.57%
4	5.96%
5+	1.99%

Highest Qualification Level

None	3.31%
School certificate	3.31%
University entrance/6th form certificate	5.96%
Trade certificate	8.61%
Tertiary diploma	13.91%
Bachelor's degree	35.10%
Post-graduate qualification	19.21%
Master's degree	6.62%
Doctorate	2.65%
Other	1.32%

1.4 Motivations for Home Education

Data regarding initial primary motivation for the decision to begin home educating is displayed in Table 2. It shows that the most common primary motivating factor was the ability to teach at their children's own pace or tailor to their requirements. Dissatisfaction with educational instruction within public schools was the second most common factor, while just 0.67% said they were motivated by distance from public schools.

Table 2. Initial Motivations for Choosing to Home Educate

Initial Motivations	Percentage
Ability to teach at child's own pace or tailor to requirements	36.24%
Dissatisfaction with educational instruction in public schools	13.42%
Special needs of child	10.07%
Lifestyle reasons	9.40%
Bullying within public schools	8.72%
Closer family unit	6.71%
Other	6.04%
Religious or spiritual reasons	5.37%
Dissatisfaction with teachers in public schools	3.36%
Distance from public schools	0.67%

Results for other motivating factors contributing to the decision to begin home educating are shown in Table 3. It shows over half of participants, 57.05%, chose the ability to teach their child/children at their own pace or tailoring to their requirements as one motivating factor in deciding to home educate. Dissatisfaction with educational instruction in public schools, a closer family unit, and lifestyle reasons were also significant motivations. As with primary motivations, distance from public schools was not a significant motivation for the majority of respondents.

Table 3. Other Motivations for Choosing to Home Educate

Other Motivations	Percentage
Ability to teach at child's own pace or tailor to requirements	57.05%
Dissatisfaction with educational instruction in public schools	48.32%
Lifestyle reasons	48.32%
Closer family unit	47.65%
Dissatisfaction with teachers in public schools	24.83%
Bullying within public schools	20.81%
Religious or spiritual reasons	19.46%
Special needs of child	12.75%
Other	12.75%
Distance from public schools	3.36%

As seen in Table 4, when asked about whether primary motivations for home educating have changed since beginning home education, just 22.15% answered yes.

Table 4. Change in Primary Motivation for Home Educating

Responses	Percentage
No	77.85%
Yes	22.15%

Results of participants who indicated a new primary motivation for home education are presented in Table 5. Of significance was the ability to teach their child/children at their own pace or tailor to their requirements. There were also 14% of participants who selected “other”. These motivations mostly related to the child’s enjoyment of home education or seeing them thrive.

Table 5. New Primary Motivation for Home Education

New Primary Motivation	Percentage
Ability to teach at child’s own pace or tailor to requirements	38.24%
Other	14.71%
Dissatisfaction with educational instruction in public schools	11.76%
Closer family unit	11.76%
Special needs of child	8.82%
Bullying within public schools	2.94%
Religious or spiritual reasons	2.94%
Lifestyle reasons	8.82%
Dissatisfaction with teachers in public schools	0.00%
Distance from public schools	0.00%

Responses regarding whether participants developed any other new motivations for continuing home education are shown in Table 6. It shows that over half of participants did have new motivations since beginning home education.

Table 6. Responses of Other New Motivations for Continuing to Home Educate

Responses	Percentage
Yes	57.33%
No	42.67%

Responses of participants who developed other new motivations for continuing to home educate are shown in Table 7. Many participants selected “other” for this question, with many referring to their child/children's enjoyment in the home education environment or improvement in their education or wellbeing. Having a closer family unit and lifestyle reasons were also common new motivations.

Table 7. Other New Motivations for Continuing to Home Educate

Other New Motivations	Percentage
Other	47.06%
Closer family unit	27.06%
Ability to teach at child's own pace or tailor to requirements	24.71%
Lifestyle reasons	21.18%
Bullying within public schools	17.65%
Dissatisfaction with educational instruction at public schools	12.94%
Special needs of child	8.24%
Dissatisfaction with teachers in public schools	5.88%
Religious or spiritual reasons	5.88%
Distance from public schools	0.00%

1.5 Challenges of Home Education

When asked whether participants had experienced any challenges as a result of their decision to home educate, a significant majority indicated they had. Just 24% of participants did not feel they had faced any challenges.

Table 8. Challenges of Home Educating Responses

Responses	Percentage
Yes	76.00%
No	24.00%

As Table 9 shows, financial stress was the most common biggest challenge parents indicated they faced, while only 4.39% indicated motivation was their biggest challenge. Of the 15.79% who selected "other", the majority of these challenges related to hostility or judgment from others, often family members, as a result of their decision to home educate.

Table 9. Biggest Home Education Challenge

Challenges	Percentage
Financial stress	21.93%
Time management	16.67%
Other	15.79%
Discrimination	12.28%
Stress	8.77%
Lack of access to resources	7.02%
Lack of government funding	6.14%
The exemption process	5.26%
Motivation	4.39%
Socialisation	1.75%

Table 10 shows all other challenges participants reported facing. Time management, financial stress, and lack of government funding were common. Other challenges mentioned were typically discrimination from others as a result of home educating their child/children. Socialisation and the exemption process were the least significant challenges selected.

Table 10. Any Other Home Education Challenges

Challenges	Percentage
Time management	28.83%
Lack of government funding	27.93%
Financial stress	27.03%
No further challenges	21.63%
Stress	21.62%
Other	19.82%
Motivation	17.12%
Discrimination	16.22%
Lack of access to resources	16.22%
Socialisation	10.81%

1.6 Qualitative Results Overview

Through use of thematic analysis, data was closely examined, identifying common themes evident in the interview transcripts. Three themes regarding motivations for home educating were identified: Control of child's education, dissatisfaction with public schooling, and lifestyle factors. Similarly, three themes regarding challenges were identified: Judgement from others, financial strain, and lack of government support. Each of these themes will be looked at individually. However, first, a brief profile of each participant will be provided with only as much detail as needed to ensure anonymity.

1.7 Participant Profiles (with pseudonyms used to ensure participants and their family members remained anonymous).

Naomi

Naomi is 38 years old and lives in Auckland with her husband and ten-year-old daughter. She is of NZ European descent and holds a Bachelor's degree. Naomi has been home educating for around two years. Prior to this, her daughter was in a public school. They are on a single income.

Cathy

Cathy is 36 years old and lives in Canterbury with her husband and three children. She has two sons, aged eleven and eight, and a daughter aged six. Cathy is of NZ European descent and holds a Master's degree. She has been educating at home for around the past three years. Both of her sons have previously attended public schools, although her daughter has always been home educated. They live on a single income.

Wendy

Wendy is 43 years old and lives in Otago with her partner and two children. Her son is thirteen, while her daughter is eleven. She is of NZ European descent and has a postgraduate qualification. She has been educating her children at home for approximately a year and a half. Prior to this, her children attended public school. Their family lives on a single income.

Jessie

Jessie is 32 years old and lives in Auckland with her husband and two sons aged seven and twelve. She is of NZ European descent and has a Bachelor's degree. She has been home educating for around two years. Her sons were previously in a public school. They live on one income.

1.8 Motivations

Control of Child's Education

The theme of control over their child's education was apparent in each participant's transcript. It was frequently discussed that now they have become home educating they can structure education to fit individual needs and are now able to move at the child's own pace. Jessie spoke about her concerns over children working at different levels in the classroom and how home educating has allowed her to take control of timeframes:

Jessie: If a student doesn't grasp particular concepts in class, there's no waiting around, they'll move on to the next topic, regardless. Likewise, if they have solid knowledge of a topic, there's little opportunity to advance until others have caught up. Being able to work at their level and within a timeframe that suits their requirements has been fantastic.

Cathy also shared similar thoughts on timeframes. She had faced the issues of one child being advanced in certain areas, while the other was struggling to keep up:

***Cathy:** Alex would come home and consistently tell me he had been given early finishers worksheets during math as he was completing the work before his peers. He would often complain the work was too easy and complained of being bored in class. Ah, I did try and discuss this with his teacher at school interviews, although obviously I understand the pressure they have and with class sizes larger than ever, it is clearly a challenge to meet every child's specific needs. Yeah, so um, not a great deal of luck there. My other child was much the opposite ironically. He would fall behind in different areas of math particularly. So, I ended up doing a lot of extra learning with them at home and observing them thrive made me want to continue learning at home, leading me down the homeschooling path, I guess. And we absolutely love it.*

It seems clear that home education was appealing in the way these participants' children can work at their own pace as opposed to a set timetable throughout the year. It would also seem that the participants had successful outcomes based on their responses such as discussing seeing them thrive at home. Naomi shared Jessie and Cathy's view of being able to regain control of her child's education. However, in terms of how the education was implemented, this was more child-led:

***Naomi:** Once we began, I realised her passions, what drives her to learn. I let her lead the way in many ways. It might be learning about plants or space, whatever she has a keen interest to discover that day, we can learn. It feels natural to let her guide the education, to express her interests and learn what she desires. There was not that opportunity in school for her. Samantha wakes up in the morning and is ready to go.*

***Me:** So, would you call your style of home education unschooling in the way Samantha can decide what she would like to learn?*

Naomi: I would. It's meaningful learning through life experiences. Tests and the like aren't important to us. Maths or science is taught in many ways. It doesn't have to be through testing.

Naomi's approach to learning seems different to that of the other participants who seem to take a more parent as educator approach. However, she also clearly embodies the theme of taking back control of her child's education after leaving a public school like the other participants.

Keeping in theme regarding taking control of their child's education, Wendy spoke about a sense of freedom after taking her children out of a public school:

Wendy: There was a sense of relief for us. You only really see a glimpse of what's going on in the classroom, through the childrens' accounts, or the brief parent interviews each term. There were reports home, but again, these were brief. I know what they are learning at home. I can track their progress and see what I can do to keep moving them forward.

I probed Wendy to elaborate on this:

Me: So, are you saying you desired to know more about what your children were doing at school? Can you tell me a little more about this?

Wendy: I just feel like I had only seen a glimpse of it. A general overview is helpful, but being able to work with them, see their progress for myself is something I have really enjoyed. I feel satisfied they are moving in the right direction.

Having the ability to take control of their child's education and play such a central role in helping their children learn seems to be fulfilling for these participants. It seems they

have found a way to teach their children in a way that works for each of them and in a way they felt the traditional school setting was not.

Dissatisfaction with Public Schooling

Participants also indicated that they were dissatisfied with public schooling, including concerns of bullying, educational instruction and curriculum. All but one participant raised the issue of bullying within schools.

Naomi: There was a nasty group of girls in Samantha's class that would really pick on her. Mostly it was verbal, but at times it had been physical. These kids were only 8 years old; it's worrying actually. Her self-esteem was getting low and as you can imagine, it was hard for her to concentrate on schoolwork. She wasn't my happy girl anymore, heart-breaking. Of course, speaking with her teacher only made matters worse for her when the mean girls found out. Kids can be cruel.

Naomi spoke of her daughter's wellbeing as a cause of concern due to the bullying she was experiencing at school. She also suggested that speaking with the teacher did not resolve this issue. I asked her to further explain what she meant by this:

Me: Can you explain what you mean when you said speaking with the teacher made things worse for your daughter?

Naomi: Sure. I organised a meeting with her and raised my concerns. She didn't seem overly surprised which indicated she was already aware of the situation. She said she would try bringing the topic of bullying up in a class discussion rather than singling any girls out. Of course, once this happened the girls assumed she had told on them and that just accelerated matters.

As can be seen in the following excerpt, Wendy's son had not only faced bullying from other children, but also felt bullied by a previous teacher:

Wendy: *He'd single him out in front of all the other students, just seemed to get off on belittling certain children. Felix went through hell; he'd ridicule him with a smile on his face while the other students laughed at his expense or joined in. When the teacher is in on the bullying or initiating it like this guy was, the child is in a pretty vulnerable position to be able to do much about it.*

Unlike Naomi's situation where the teacher attempted to resolve the bullying situation, Wendy's son seemed to have been in a situation where resolving the issue was more challenging. To understand this situation better, I asked Wendy to elaborate:

Me: *How did you find out about this situation and did you take steps to try and resolve the situation?*

Wendy: *I did not find out about this for a long time. About halfway through the first term, and having this new teacher, I noticed he was quiet, but he wouldn't tell me what was bothering him. It wasn't until it got really bad, that he broke down one day after school and opened up about it. I could not believe it. I was straight on the phone to the principal who seemed concerned about the issue and we had a group meeting with him and Felix's teacher the next afternoon. He basically talked his way out of it and insinuated we were overbearing parents. Things did not change one bit. Eventually we decided he should not have to endure this. There were other issues that led to the decision alongside this, but it was a biggie.*

Based on the participant's reflections, it seems they are not only concerned about the bullying their children experienced in public schools but have some dissatisfaction in regard to how the schools handled the situations.

Dissatisfaction with how public schools taught their students was also discussed. Cathy elaborated on her feelings of dissatisfaction with what she feels is a shift in how public schools are educating:

Cathy: *Ah, John and I also felt there was less emphasis on the academics at school these days, with, dare I say, more of a lean towards play. Not to say that playing isn't important, of course this is a crucial element of development. But we felt there was less academic learning occurring than we really felt comfortable with, yeah.*

Me: *So how do you feel your home education differs to the public schooling?*

Cathy: *We still have fun, don't get me wrong. But there has to be learning going on. They need to do that spelling, writing, learn their mathematics. They were further behind with what I would expect them to be learning in some areas at school. You only have to look at the literacy and numeracy figures in New Zealand to see that academic learning has dropped.*

Jessie shared a similar opinion on the issue of learning, although questioned whether the rise in technology use was also a contributing factor:

Jessie: *Books were coming home completely unused at the end of the year. What were they doing all year? Hardly any pencil to paper at all. Whether that's to do with the use of tablets and things though, I'm not sure, or just how schools operate now. (Sighs). I believe there needs to be a balance for sure.*

In contrast to Cathy and Jessie, Naomi felt play was a crucial part of learning, emphasising focusing too strictly on academics can be stressful on a child.

Naomi: *Children learn through play and exploring their environment. Pressuring our kids too much can have the opposite effect to what we are trying to achieve. Less of pushing the curriculum, let them learn naturally.*

Naomi also felt technology can have a positive impact on her child's learning, yet agreed with fellow participants that too much use has a negative effect:

Naomi: *Samantha can research to her heart's content, there's an enormous amount of information on the web. Not like when I was a kid (laughs). We had to dig out the books!*

But we are careful with what she can access and screen times. Too much time looking at a screen is detrimental to her health. At home, I can monitor this.

There seems to be some dissatisfaction with the amount of academic learning being taught for three of the four participants. However, Naomi held a different view of academic learning and felt natural learning was more important. There was also some concern over using technology too much or not being able to monitor it.

Lifestyle Factors

Lifestyle reasons were commonly referred to by participants as a motivation for choosing to home educate or continue home educating. This included less stress, flexibility, and a closer family unit. There was a lot of discussion regarding home education feeling less stressful than public schooling. Naomi's excerpt is an example of this:

Naomi: School life can be stressful, there's a lot of expectations. I'd rather go with the flow and provide Samantha with support to reach her goals instead of pushing her and stressing her out. How can that be positive? There doesn't have to be that 9-3pm structure. Learning should be fun, exciting; not stressful.

It seemed Naomi was suggesting that school was a stressful environment for her child. I asked her to give me some examples of why she felt this was the case.

Me: It sounds as though you believe school could be stressful for your child. Can you give me some examples of why you feel this way and in what way has this changed since home educating?

Naomi: The stress of timetables for one. The pressure of meeting targets alongside peers despite some difference in capabilities is another big one for me. Learning cannot be rushed; it is a journey that should be enjoyable. That's what we do at home, no pressure, no stress. She is happy, she enjoys learning.

It seems that Naomi feels that by taking the pressure of timetables and meeting certain standards by a particular time, her daughter was happier and enjoyed her learning time. Cathy agreed with Naomi's opinion regarding structured timetables. She elaborated on the flexibility she feels home education offers her and her children:

Cathy: There's some great benefits to homeschool life. Hey, if they want to do their morning math in their pyjamas, I'm not going to hold them back! (Laughs). But there's other perks, we can go on holiday when we please, usually when there are less people on the roads like you would typically see over the scheduled school holidays. Of course, we can choose our own timetables, we can fit their learning around our life.

Similarly, Wendy referred to the home education lifestyle when talking about her motivations. She also touched on how she feels her family has become stronger as a result of spending more time together than when they were previously in public schools:

Wendy: In summer, we'll often pack up their books and a picnic, and drive to the beach for the afternoon. Learning in nature has to be better than in a stuffy classroom. I genuinely feel our family is closer than ever, just having this time together.

I wanted to better understand in what ways her family had grown closer as a result of home educating.

Me: So, you feel closer as a family now that you are home educating as opposed to when your children were at a public school. Can you explain this for me in a little more detail please?

Wendy: Inevitably, being together a lot has made us grow closer together. We understand each other more. The kids have learned to co-operate more efficiently and help each other out. I barely saw them during the week when they went to school and the weekends they were often with friends or playing sport. Our family values and morals have

been instilled, we have more respect for one another and there is just a feeling of a closer bond in general.

Jessie also mentioned her family felt stronger since beginning home education:

***Jessie:** I'm much closer with them which is wonderful in these younger years. They're not going to be children forever. Our family bond feels stronger.*

There seems to be some consensus among participants that home educating provides them with a less stressful environment than in a public school. They also referred to the benefits of flexibility around schedules, learning environment, and activities outside of education. A sense of a stronger family connection since beginning home education was also discussed.

1.9 Challenges

Judgment from Others

A theme identified in the participant's transcripts was the challenge of feeling judgment from others. This included judgment from strangers in public, friends, family, and previous public school educators. Naomi selected "discrimination" as her biggest challenge in the previously completed survey. I wanted to understand what she meant by this:

***Me:** In the survey, you chose discrimination as your biggest challenge. Can you elaborate on what discrimination you feel as a result of your decision to home educate?*

***Naomi:** Oh, yes. Discrimination. All the time! Say if we go to the shops during school hours, people will actually ask why my child isn't in school. Some people are fine when I explain. But other people can make negative comments about it or question Samantha about whether she misses her friends and stuff. Ridiculous.*

***Me:** So, you feel discrimination from the public at times. In terms of this being a challenge, how does this discrimination affect you, or feel like a challenge I guess is what I'm asking?*

***Naomi:** It is difficult not to let it affect you. It shouldn't, but I am human. There's often such a negative view of it. They don't see or I suppose know of the benefits. They don't see what we do at home and they don't see the successes. The main challenge from the discrimination is justifying myself and our life continuously.*

It appears that Naomi finds judgment from others challenging in the way that she has to explain and defend her educational choice to others often. Wendy shared this frustration regarding members of the public judging her at times, but had also experienced judgement from some friends and family:

***Wendy:** Mum and my eldest sister were completely against the idea. We really fell out over it, but they are coming to terms with it. After seeing how well it's going for us, I think it's given them a bit more of an open mind. Same with friends who criticised the idea, a few are even considering it themselves now (laughs). The criticism comes from a lack of understanding. People always criticise what they don't understand, anything outside the norm is considered wacky.*

It seems that judgement from others can be a common challenge experienced by home education parents. Having to constantly defend and justify their decision to home educate seems to be one of the primary stressors rising from this. Although, it would seem that in some cases, such as Wendy's, judgement may not continue to be an ongoing challenge in all scenarios, such as with friends or families. In this way it seems when home education is understood better, it is not always perceived as such a radical educational decision.

Financial Strain

Financial strain was a common challenge discussed. This was typically due to the families interviewed living on one income, as opposed to two. Jessie explained this challenge in more detail and ways her family manage it:

Jessie: Allan makes decent money, so we get by. We don't have as much money as when I was working too, but that's how it goes. During certain times of the year, things can be a bit tight. Budgeting and just being sensible with how we spend is key. We are lucky to have the means to homeschool our kids, there's likely families who might want to but just couldn't get by on that sole income.

Jessie seems grateful her family is able to get by on her husband's income, although points out this can be a challenge at times. This was also echoed by Wendy when I asked her about her selection of "financial strain" as one of her home education challenges in her survey:

Wendy: Financial strain, yeah, sometimes. But we are by no means struggling. We have what we need.

Naomi seemed to be in a similar financial situation whereby her partner was earning enough money to ensure the family's needs were supported. In turn, being able to focus on home education her children full-time. However financial strain remained a challenge at times:

Naomi: It can be stressful around Christmas holidays; we can't afford the latest and best like we used to. But money isn't everything. We are happy and healthy, that's more important.

While money was discussed by participants as being a challenge at times, it seemed that the option to home educate outweighed this. They managed the challenge by budgeting or focusing on being grateful for their families.

Lack of Government Support

A final challenge mentioned was a lack of government support. This included funding and access to resources. Wendy felt that the Home education Supervision Allowance was not enough:

Wendy: *I know it's our choice to do this and we went in knowing the funding was minimal, but it does not go far. A little more funding would be helpful throughout the year for educational resources and the like. There's inequality between public schooling and home education in that way.*

Wendy feels that additional funding would be useful to purchase further resources as the funding does not meet her family's needs. She also felt some inequality in favour of public schooling. Cathy also shared this opinion:

Cathy: *Funding hasn't gone up at all. It's 2020 and we still receive the same amount. I feel there needs to be even a small rise. A lot has changed over the years, funding needs to allow for this.*

In addition to agreeing the home education allowance was not enough, Jessie commented further on difficulty accessing resources:

Jessie: *It's hard to find all the resources we need at times; you really have to search for them. I'd like to have a bit more information provided to us and be able to access the resources schools can.*

Me: *Can you give me an example of some of these?*

Jessie: *Online resources are an example. Schools usually get programmes funded, while we have to pay for subscriptions. They can be expensive.*

When asked about government support, Naomi was not concerned about the supervisory allowance, although agreed that accessing adequate resources would be useful.

Naomi: *I think the allowance is fair, we are lucky to get anything. I'd like to be able to know more about what resources are available for us though.*

Most participants felt there was a lack of funding for home education and felt some inequality in comparison to what public schools receive. Naomi was not concerned about the allowance amount, however shared the opinion of other participants that there was a lack of access to resources which was said to be a challenge for participants at times.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the results from the surveys used for the quantitative phase followed by the results of the interviews used for the qualitative phase. The survey data revealed that women were primarily responsible for home educating, they were predominantly of New Zealand European descent, and often had a high level of education. The majority of participants fitted within the 35-54 age range and were educating 1-2 children, with Auckland being the most common region they lived in. The most frequent motivation for home educating was the ability to teach at their child's own pace and tailor education to meet their requirements. Results showed that motivations often changed or were built upon as parents began home educating. Furthermore, 76 percent of participants had faced challenges as a result of home educating, with the most common challenge experienced being financial stress. Qualitative results found three themes regarding motivations the interviewees had to home educate. These included: control of child's education, dissatisfaction with public schooling, and lifestyle factors. Likewise, three themes were identified for challenges experienced as a result of home educating. These themes were: judgment from others, financial strain, and lack of government support.

CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion

1.1 Introduction

This chapter will begin by summarising the study aim and procedures in section 1.2. Each research question will be discussed separately with reference to literature. Section 1.3 discusses who is educating and section 1.4 focuses on the motivations behind home education. Challenges faced as a result of home education will be discussed in section 1.5. The chapter ends with a conclusion of the discussion in section 1.6.

1.2 Summary of Study

Despite increasing numbers of children being home educated in New Zealand, understanding this educational trend is unknown. Therefore, this study aimed to identify who is home educating in New Zealand, motivating factors for choosing this educational choice, and any challenges faced. Using a survey approach allowed for collection of data from 151 participants in the New Zealand home educating population. Furthermore, the qualitative phase involving four follow-up interviews provided depth and further understanding. Tailoring education to meet the pace and needs of their children was a typical motivation in the qualitative phase. Regarding challenges, financial stress and time management were common responses in the survey. In addition to the survey findings, the follow-up interviews identified three themes as motivating factors: control over child's education, dissatisfaction with public schools, and lifestyle factors. A further three themes were identified for challenges: judgment from others, financial stress, and a lack of government support.

1.3 Who is Home Educating?

The survey used for this study gained a useful response, providing some valuable demographic data to determine who is home educating in New Zealand in 2020. Like previous research within New Zealand, the primary educator was found to be a mother

(Kerslake et al., 1998; Roache, 2009). This was also consistent with Slater et al.'s (2020) study of Australian home educators. Historically, mothers have typically taken on the role of staying home with the children while their husband works (Lamar, Forbes, & Capasso, 2019). Therefore, taking on the role of teacher at home is likely due to this historical gender role mothers have typically played. This is not to say that all home educators solely educate; some work part-time, for example. Nevertheless, the majority of home educators still traditionally live on one income and typically the male's.

When looking at the current data, it is still apparent that home educators are predominantly NZ European as was the case historically (Roache, 2009). Likewise, home educators remained predominantly white in the Australian and United States research (Hirsh, 2019; Jolly & Matthews, 2020; Slater et al., 2020). However, the United States did see a rise in the numbers of coloured home educators. In terms of the current study, there does not appear to be a rise in home educators of other ethnicities home educating in the same way the United States research found. The most recent statistics regarding ethnicity of home educated students also does not show an increase over the decade (Education Counts, 2020). It is likely there is such a rise in black home educators in the United States as a result of the ongoing inequalities they continue to face in public schools (Puga, 2019). It is also possible the black lives matter movement where those of colour are protesting against racism and inequality also contributes to this growth (Black Lives Matter, 2020).

In terms of the home educators' qualifications, 64.85% of participants had a Bachelor's degree or higher. This aligned with Roache (2009) and Slater et al.'s (2020) findings. However, as previously highlighted, this could be due to those with a higher qualification being more likely to participate in the study. This also aligns with the general population. That is, more highly educated individuals were found to be significantly more likely to volunteer than those with lower educational levels (Salkind, 2010).

It was important to include both the North Island and the South Island in the quantitative phase. Particularly with some regions such as Canterbury having a large proportion of home educators. A look at the most current statistics regarding home educating students by region, indicates Canterbury has seen more increase than many other regions such as Otago where numbers have only seen a small increase by year (Education Counts, 2020). South Island home educators were not included in the most recent qualitative study in New Zealand (Roache, 2009), so it was useful to conduct interviews with participants from both islands to compare experiences. There was little difference in the experiences across the two islands, however as there were only two participants interviewed per island, it is not possible to generalise to the wider home educating community in New Zealand.

Most respondents were educating one to two children which is in contrast to Roache's (2009) study where three children were the average number. However, Slater et al.'s (2020) study also found one or two children to be most common. There is nothing in the literature to suggest why this is the case, however, it could be surmised this is due to Roache having a lower number of participants.

1.4 Motivating Factors for Home Education

As with Roache's (2009) research into home education in New Zealand, survey data indicated that participants' motivations for home education can change over time. This finding is also reflective of Gaither's (2017) research in the United States. This is interesting as it shows how the experience of home educating can make the educator reflect on what drives their decision to continue educating in a way they may not have thought of before beginning. What once was the primary motivation can be replaced by more significant motivations over time.

One dominant theme motivating home educators in New Zealand was found to be taking control of their child's education. Roache (2009) noted this in his report also. Within the current study, the ability to teach children at their own pace and tailor education to their personal requirements was the most common initial motivation. In addition, when asked about any other motivating factors alongside their primary motivations, tailoring education to their child's needs and pace was again the most common response. In addition to these interesting survey findings, all interviews further revealed this was a driving force. It would appear that home educators in this study did not feel the public school can adequately meet their children's needs in the way they believe they are able to in their home environment. While Roache's (2009) study discussed the lack of individualisation in public schools as an issue for some of his participants, it was not discussed in such detail and with as much passion as the current study's participants. Although, it is worth considering that some of his participant's children had not attended a public school before, therefore did not have personal experiences of that to share. Home educators discussed their concern of this frequently. Some interviewees were opposed to the timetables within public schools and felt it brought extra stress to the learning process. They were often frustrated with their children struggling in one area, while some were bored in class and requiring further challenge. Overall, they felt as though the public school environment cannot keep up with every child and by taking control by home educating, they were able to fill these gaps and witness positive progress. Feeling less stress and anxiety once leaving the public school environment and beginning home education has also been reported in international research (Nelson, 2014). Furthermore, a study by Guterman and Neuman (2016) indicated home educated students are less likely to experience depression or externalising behaviours in comparison to students in a public school.

In line with some previous research, this study revealed there was some dissatisfaction with elements of public schooling such as some concern over bullying (Roache, 2009). While the survey showed bullying was not commonly a primary motivation for home education, 20.81% did select it as another contributing factor. Bullying concerns were also mentioned in all but three of the follow-up interviews. Surprisingly, this was not always primarily aimed at peers but also bullying from some teachers. There was a feeling of dissatisfaction among these participants who felt the way in which the bullying was addressed by the schools was not helpful in resolving the problem. Roache (2009) highlighted concerns about bullying in schools as a motivation for home education in his study a decade ago. This concern was reported by participants who had seen bullying in schools as a child and/or as a teacher, as opposed to their child experiencing it in the past. Concerns over bullying in public schools was also found to be a strong motivating factor for some home educators according to recent international literature (Kunzman, & Gaither, 2020). In Morton's (2017) study into home education in England and Wales, bullying within public schools was also a reason given to begin home educating. Like the current study, home educators were unhappy with how the school handled the bullying situations. For each of these parents, multiple attempts were made to resolve the bullying, with limited success. In this way, the parents felt that removing their child from school and educating them at home was a last resort. Often this was due to protecting the emotional wellbeing of their child. In terms of rates of bullying in New Zealand schools, this has not increased over the past ten years. However, it has also not been reducing. (Ministry of Education, n.d.). Furthermore, in comparison to other countries, rates of bullying in New Zealand schools are considered high (Ministry of Education, n.d.). Bullying in schools is clearly not a new occurrence, however it is obviously an ongoing issue. Furthermore, realising that some parents are dissatisfied with

the way bullying is handled in schools and choosing to home educate to protect their child shows there could be some room for improvement.

There was also some discussion around whether public schools are focusing less on academic learning with a focus towards play. One participant brought up declining literacy and numeracy levels in New Zealand schools to support her views. Interestingly, a new report has just emerged: *New Zealand's Education Delusion: How Bad Ideas Ruined a Once World-Leading School System*, authored by Briar Lipson (2020). It discusses how New Zealand once had a world-leading ranking in educational achievement and emphasises the continual decline over the last 20 years. For instance, once third worldwide for reading, New Zealand is now sitting at sixth. In regard to mathematics, New Zealand is 19th in the world. Lipson (2020) suggests these declining educational standards are due to a flawed philosophy based on a child-centred learning approach. While allowing children to be involved in decision making in the classroom has shown to have benefits (Pereira & Smith-Adcock, 2011), Lipson (2020) suggests the approach has become too extreme and is providing the opposite outcome that it intends to. This reflects the beliefs of some interviewees in the current study who cited dissatisfaction with methods of teaching in school as a reason for beginning home education. However, not all participants shared this view regarding child-centred learning. Unlike the other three participants, Naomi appeared to adopt an unschooling approach. She felt self-directed learning was crucial for her child's development and that through all experiences in life and through play, her child could self-educate in a way. This is much like the culture of hunter-gatherers whereby children have been shown to successfully learn through self-directed exploration of the world around them and by playing (Riley, 2020). Some critics of the unschooling movement argue that by allowing a child to pick the topics they desire to learn, there may be gaps in their knowledge. Despite some criticism, unschooling through play and self-learning remains a popular movement that has been shown to be successful for

some home educated children (Riley, 2020). It is intriguing that while some home educators in this study were motivated to home educate due to what they perceived as a lack of academic learning in schools, another was motivated by a desire to move away from formal academics. It seems clear that there is some debate around the most successful style of education both within public schools and home education settings and both benefits and drawbacks to each.

In addition to some concerns over a lack of academic learning occurring in schools, there was discussion regarding too much technology use. This is a new concern in comparison to previous home education research in New Zealand. This reflects the large change that technology has had on the school environment over the past decade and consequently some parents' motivations to educate at home. Pell (2018) conducted a study investigating home educators' perspectives of teaching with technology, finding a mix of views. All participants incorporated technology into their educational practice, finding it valuable for resources, connecting with others, and viewing computer skills as important for their future. However, like the current study, some participants emphasised a strong belief that technology use needs to be monitored and learning to write with a pencil for example, was equally important (Pell, 2018).

Lifestyle reasons and a closer family unit were not commonly a primary motivating factor for beginning home education. Nevertheless, just under half of survey respondents included these as additional motivations. Furthermore, during the interviews, lifestyle factors were identified as a theme which incorporated these two motivations. Interviewees spoke of having less stress and more freedom in their lives. There was some discussion of this in Roache's (2009) study. For example, not having to rush their children out the door to get to school by a certain time, not having to make pre-packed lunches and being able to have the flexibility to go for a walk and have special lunches together on a warm day as a family. In

the current study, being able to spend more time together as a family was also considered a positive aspect of their home education lifestyle. There was a sense of stronger connections between family members. It should be mentioned that choosing to home educate due to a desire to have a closer family unit was not typically an initial motivation reported in the surveys, just 6.71% of participants chose this. However, importantly, 47.65% selected this as an additional motivation and 11.76% responded that having a closer family unit was their new primary motivation contributing to them continuing home education. This indicates that for some participants they realise their family becomes closer as they begin home education. It seems to be a valued benefit that home education can bring. Internationally, strengthening family connections has also been found to be one motivation for home education, often alongside other more central reasons, consistent with this study's findings (Tihou, 2020).

Previous research in New Zealand found religion or spirituality to be a common driving force for home education (Roache, 2009). By contrast, just 5.37% began home educating for these reasons. However, 19.46% included this as another motivation alongside their initial motivations. Religion was not referred to throughout any follow-up interviews as a factor in participants' decision to home educate. It would seem then there is some shift regarding the most prominent motivations for choosing this educational option over the past decade. This is like more recent research internationally whereby religion and spirituality are not as typical reasons to begin home educating (Gaither, 2017; Slater et al., 2020).

1.5 Home Education Challenges

Judgment from others was referred to throughout this study. Less so in the quantitative phase, but commonly in the follow-up interviews. Participants had experienced judgment from members of the public during school hours and also from friends or family members. While previous New Zealand research has not reported this challenge, it is similar

to some research in the United States regarding the challenge of feeling judged or stereotyped (Hauseman, 2011). It is interesting that this hadn't been highlighted as a significant issue in New Zealand in the past which raises the question if judgment towards home educators is more typical in the current era. Hauseman (2011) suggested that with an increase in internet use or television viewing, seeing negative portrayals of, and stereotyping home education is more likely. This is said to contribute to an increase in judgment from the general public based on these depictions (Hauseman, 2011). Considering the rise in technology, particularly internet use, in the current day, this could certainly be a reason why home educators are reporting judgment as a common challenge in 2020, as opposed to a decade ago. In much of the interviews conducted, it was evident that participants felt frustrated at the need to defend themselves to others regarding their educational choice. To address this challenge, it seems crucial to continue updating the research on home education to help inform and provide understanding to the general public, ideally minimising this feeling of judgment some home educators feel.

Time management was reported as the second biggest challenge by participants in the quantitative phase of the study, but interestingly not within the follow-up interviews. Understanding this challenge is difficult as the quantitative data did not allow for elaboration on what was meant by this. A search of international literature did not find any commonalities among home educators regarding this challenge. Considering this was ranked as one of the biggest challenges home educators face in New Zealand, there is some need to investigate this further to address possible strategies to aid educators.

Financial strain was a challenge identified in both phases of this study. Follow-up interviews found that this is often due to living on one income. It seemed that while finances could be tight at times, all families spoken to felt home educating outweighed this challenge and found ways to manage it. Findings from the interviews, however, may not accurately

reflect the financial situation of all home educators who responded in the quantitative phase. Financial stress was not a significant issue raised in previous New Zealand or international research referred to in the literature review. It could be that the price of living in New Zealand has continued to increase over the decade resulting in financial challenges for some home educators. For example, the price of petrol, housing, insurance, and electricity have increased significantly (Consumer, 2019).

While financial stress was not specifically referred to in previous studies, challenges relating to lack of government support were. Reflective of Kerslake et al.'s (1998) research, this study found participants felt challenged by a lack of financial assistance. It was intriguing Roache's (2009) study did not find funding an issue in the same way. The home education supervisory allowance has not increased in the last decade. Based on the fact that financial stress seemed to be such a common challenge faced in the current era of home education, it could be questioned whether the home education allowance needs to be increased to meet the cost of living in the current era. Although, it is important to keep in mind that not all home educators were dissatisfied with the allowance and some choose not to claim this. This leads to the next challenge regarding a lack of government support. Like the current study, Kerslake al. (1998) and Roache (2009) found a lack of access to resources was an issue. This was mentioned in both the survey and interviews in the current study. Participants found it difficult to find what they needed at times and felt some inequality between what they had access to in comparison to public schools. It would seem that this is an unresolved issue that needs to be addressed. This has also been an issue internationally. In relation to financial strain on other aspects of their lives, some participants felt that the home education allowance was not enough to cover all educational resources required throughout the year. This was mentioned in Kerslake et al.'s (1998) study, but Roache (2009) did not identify this as an

issue. Looking into how to provide adequate access to resources for home educators such as through free subscriptions to educational websites may be beneficial.

While a small proportion of participants referred to stress as their biggest challenge, 21.62% did include this as an additional challenge. By contrast, stress was not discussed in interviews. Due to the limited insight a survey provides, it is unknown what type of stress home education caused these individuals. When looking at “who” educators were, it was identified they were primarily mothers. As seen in international literature, it is possible this stress is caused by taking on the extra role of teacher alongside the parenting role (Gaither, 2017; Stevens, 2001). Investigating whether this is the case in New Zealand also may prove beneficial. Understanding the cause of this stress seems important overall.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a discussion including the interpretation and relevance of this study’s findings. Reflective of previous New Zealand and international research, there remain some commonalities regarding who is home educating. For instance, most home educators were white females. Despite demographics remaining mostly the same, there was some shift in motivations from previous research. Namely, religious or spiritual motivations were less common and tailoring education to meet the pace and the needs of their child was dominant. It was discussed that public schools do not seem to meet the needs of all children and parents were finding success in the home with individualised learning. Being motivated by bullying in schools was also discussed with a suggestion that schools may need to look into how they handle this issue to receive better outcomes for some children whose parents feel home education is their only resort. Literacy and numeracy levels in New Zealand schools were highlighted in regard to some parents being motivated by a dissatisfaction with what schools were teaching. In contrast to the view schools did not focus on academic

learning enough, the opposing view of unschooling was described. It was proposed, with reference to the literature, that educational approaches vary within public schools and in the home, with benefits and drawbacks to all. Technology use was also touched on as it was found that participants were often dissatisfied with an overuse of this in schools. Lifestyle reasons to home educate were also discussed with reference to stronger family bonds and a feeling of less stress educating at home. Finally, there was a discussion regarding challenges some home educators faced. Not mentioned in the most recent New Zealand research, the current study found judgment and stereotyping continues to exist for some home educators. It was suggested that changing these negative portrayals from some requires enhanced public understanding of the home education community through further research and education. The challenge of time management as a new finding was also discussed with a recommendation to look into this further in future. A discussion regarding the challenges of financial strain and a lack of government support was also included considering whether an increase in funding and access to resources was needed to minimise these issues.

CHAPTER SIX: Conclusion

1.1 Introduction

This final chapter begins with an overall conclusion of the research in section 1.2, highlighting significant findings from the study. Recommendations based on the findings from this study are also discussed in section 1.3. Following this, section 1.4 highlights strengths of this study while section 1.5 addressed limitations of the study. A final conclusion of the chapter is provided in section 1.6.

1.2 Conclusion

The number of individuals home educating in New Zealand is higher than it has ever been. Home educators remain predominantly female and New Zealand European. Additionally, those in this study tended to have a higher education level. Reasons for the rise in home education within New Zealand in 2020 seem to be complex and there is some diversity regarding reasons behind parents' decision to choose this educational alternative. It was evident that each individual who decided to home educate had their own unique rationales and often more than one motivation for doing so. Furthermore, while there are often initial primary motivations for beginning home education, it appears new motivations can emerge along the way. Teaching children at their own pace and being able to tailor education to meet their needs was a driving factor for many home educators. It seemed that working at an individualised level was appealing to them and they had positive experiences to share as a result of this. A feeling of dissatisfaction with public schooling was also a typical motivation for beginning home education. This related to concerns such as bullying or a dislike for the style of educational instruction in schools. Some challenges identified for home educators of the current era included financial strain, judgment, time management, and

lack of government support. Looking into the identified challenges further will help to understand ways in which these challenges can be managed.

From this study, it could be concluded that some parents feel public school is not right for their child. While some children may thrive in the school setting, others may be better suited to a home environment experiencing equally positive outcomes. Despite participants sharing positive experiences regarding home education, it was clear that this educational approach can also have some challenges. Overall, this study has provided some useful insight into home education in New Zealand in 2020. It is hoped that it has helped to provide further understanding of this educational option; understanding of who is choosing to do this, reasons for choosing this, and understanding challenges that can arise as a result of this decision.

1.3 Recommendations for Future Research

There is still much unknown about home education in New Zealand, with the rise in this educational alternative, providing a more thorough understanding through further research can help fill in these gaps. For instance, an exploration into the role of home educators as both parents and educators could be useful to understand whether family systems are changed or challenged resulting in stress or pressure for the educator. In understanding whether this can be an issue, the research can help inform ways this can be managed to ensure the wellbeing of home educators is healthy.

The current study discovered some common challenges home educators face that have not been identified before, such as time management. Looking into time management further could be beneficial to understand this challenge more sufficiently. This research could potentially lead to a development of solutions to support home educators in managing this issue. Exploring challenges home educators face in general will be helpful to identify solutions to common issues.

Finally, as the rise in home education has increased significantly over the Covid-19 pandemic, it would be useful to investigate the cause of this. For example, were health concerns a driving factor or did parents who were required to home educate over the lockdown period see it as a new viable option after experiencing it?

1.4 Study Strengths

This study's main strength was the way in which it used a mixed method approach. Using quantitative and qualitative methods allowed for both breadth and depth. That is, it did not just collect numerical data in the areas of interest but elaborated on it through exploring home educators' experiences more deeply with interviews. In addition, ensuring participants were included from all regions of New Zealand ensured the data were more reflective of the home educating population than if participants were simply sourced from one or two regions or one island.

1.5 Limitations

This study was not without limitations. One potential limitation was that participants in the study may have had preconceived ideas about what the study aimed to achieve, potentially responding in ways they felt would help work towards the goals of the study. Another weakness is that only four participants were involved in the semi-structured interviews. While the interviews provided some valuable insight into their experiences, it is not generalisable. Additional interviews would have allowed the researcher to see whether the views and experiences would have accurately reflected different home educators. Finally, as the researcher was a home educator themselves, it is possible views and beliefs held regarding motivations and challenges may have influenced the interpretation of findings.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overall conclusion of the study, summarising main points. Recommendations for future research based on the findings of this report was also included. For example, looking into the family dynamics and potential challenge of home educators playing both a parent and educator role. Strengths of the study including the mixed method approach used were outlined and limitations such as low interview numbers were explained.

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Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. What is your gender?
2. What age group do you belong to?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. Which region of New Zealand do you belong to?
5. How many children are you currently home educating?
6. What is your highest level of qualification?
7. What was your primary motivation for deciding to home educate your child/children?
8. Please tick any other initial motivating factors for deciding to home educate your child/children.
9. Have your initial motivations for deciding to home educate your child/children shifted since beginning your journey?
10. Please tick your current primary motivation for home educating your child/children.
11. Do you have any other new motivations for continuing to home educate your child/children?
12. Please tick any new motivations for continuing to home educate your child/children.
13. Have you faced any challenges as a result of your decision to home educate your child/children?
14. What is the biggest challenge faced as a result of your decision to home educate?
15. Have you faced any further challenges as a result of your decision to home educate?

Appendix B: Example Focus for Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Can you explain what motivated you to begin home education?
2. In what way did home education differ from public schooling?
3. Can you elaborate on how your motivation for home education changed over time?
4. Would you be able to describe in more detail the challenges you mentioned facing?
5. How do you handle the challenges that arise?