

Christian Learners' and Parents' Choice of Faith-Based Homeschooling

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Abstract¹

Currently, the South African Basic Education Laws Amendment Bill (BELA) (Clause 37) replaces and adds provision to the South African Schools Act including regulating homeschooling. Home education research found that more and more parents appreciate/opt for the benefits of faith-based homeschooling, in this case, the Christian faith. The main reason is that since COVID-19, many Christian parents had the urge to preserve their Christian principles, Christian worldview, and quality education by opting for Christian faith-based homeschooling. This is a qualitative study and the purpose of this research was to determine which driving forces propel the choice of parents and their children to do homeschooling. The findings suggest that Christian faith-based homeschooling is a process facilitated by a triadic relationship consisting of the pastor, the parent/s, and the learner/s. In addition, based on the factors identified, their faith is paramount as they believe/think they are led by the Holy Spirit. Recommendations are offered regarding Christian faith-based homeschooling.

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Introduction

Currently there is a growing cohort of children who are being homeschooled across the world (Ray 2021:55). It is noteworthy that nowadays homeschooling (HS) include parents from all social, racial, and ethnic backgrounds (Ray 2016:30) including those ‘who hold to vastly divergent worldviews’ (Ray 2021:61). The reasons for the influx of homeschoolers as an alternative option to institutional schools, particularly in South Africa, are that parents want to make sure that their children have access to education that is affordable and of high quality, and that they attain individualized experiences, in particular for those who have special needs (Dlamini, Maharaj, & Dunn 2021:106).

The devastating effects of COVID-19 and the nationwide lockdown and closing of schools exacerbated the education situation (Dlamini *et al.* 2021:106-107). Ricci, Growden, and Michaud (2021:107) profess, ‘Homeschoolers should learn from mainstream schooling’s mistakes, and not simply replicate that model’. Dlamini *et al.* (2021:117) recommend that in South Africa there should be a nationwide awareness and readily available knowledge of HS. It is thus imperative to conduct research in order to inform policy.

Only a few research studies have been conducted on HS, mostly from a parental perspective, since they are usually the ones making the choice to homeschool their children (Neuman 2020:566). There is a lack of knowledge about the children’s perspective as pointed out by Valiente, Spinrad, Ray, Eisenberg, and Ruof (2022:49). Not much is known about the children’s perspectives when deciding to do HS. Van Schalkwyk and Bouwer (2011:179) explain that it is necessary to heed homeschool learners’ voices ‘for a reliable understanding of the homeschool context’. Hence, in this study, we deemed it important to incorporate the learners’ experiences of Christian faith-based homeschooling (FBHS).

Around the world there is a wide array of laws and policies regarding HS (Ray 2021:56). De Beer, Vos, and Myburgh (2020:49) have conducted a comparative literature study on homeschooling in the then BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). In these countries, HS is only legalized in South Africa and Russia. The South African Basic Education

Laws Amendment Bill (BELA), Clause 37 that awaits the signature of the President 'will replace and add new provisions to the South African Schools Act (SASA) that includes regulating homeschooling'.

Our focus in this study is on Christian FBHS. In the sections that follow, HS including Christian FBHS is discussed, a theoretical framework is presented, followed by a suitable research methodology guided by the research questions, and finally there is a discussion of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

The main research question is: *Which factors serve as strong driving forces in opting for FBHS?* The sub-research questions are:

1. How are the learners involved in the decision-making process of FBHS selection, if at all?
2. How does HS impact family life and socialization?

Homeschooling

Valiente *et al.* (2022:48) define homeschooling as 'parent-directed education that largely takes place in the home'. The parents are responsible for the children's education, but they can also request other people to help them to teach their children. The homeschoolers can also participate in learning activities that are not home-based. Online schooling, hybrid homeschools, and learners who are temporarily learning at home are not considered homeschoolers as they are under the direction of a school. In South Africa, Dlamini *et al.* (2021:106) found that particularly during the COVID-19 era there was an increased interest in homeschooling since it is considered 'a safer and more viable option', and it is affordable, offers individualized experiences, and a form of high-quality education (Dlamini *et al.* 2021:106).

Some parents prefer unschooling, where the child can learn whatever they are interested in and are not guided by formal HS curricula. It could involve formal learning materials and less structured approaches. On the other hand, some parents prefer more structured approaches which require formal curricula (Valiente *et al.* 2022:50). Virtual classrooms are a way to bridge the programs between HS and public schools. The most important criterion for a HS program is content that suits the family's beliefs (e.g., incorporating religious content), cost effectiveness, literature-based content, and hands-on activities where problem-solving is involved (Norman & Luo 2020:12-13, 16).

Since HS is flexible, parents do not have to stick to one curriculum. They can make changes and, in so doing, move their children forward or backwards regarding their grade level.

Tilhou (2020:86) refers to charter, co-op (co-operative), and hybrid models of HS. Co-ops are popular as the homeschooling parents share teaching with other parents and field experts where they are able to interact with other adults and students. E-learning materials are also used to supplement their teaching (Valiente *et al.* 2022:50). Where parents are co-instructors with teachers, their choice of a school model for their child/ren includes factors such as more time with the family and ‘ensuring longevity in their faith’ (Cagle 2021:144, 157).

Charter schools in California’s main instructional method utilize home-based education, requiring learners to participate in the state’s standardized testing program. At charter schools, parents can offer education to their children with the services of other adults while they are teaching other parents’ children at the same school. Co-ops and hybrid schools are similar. Hybrid homeschools have an independent board of directors and are typical private organizations. They have full-day schedules, selected curricula, and hired teachers, while teaching is more formal than that of co-ops. Hybrid models are not state-funded, hence they rely on grants, fundraising, and annual tuition fees (Wearne quoted in Tilhou 2020:87-88). In certain school districts, partnerships are formed between public schools and homeschool educators. The learners are allowed to attend classes and programs, however, the primary teacher is the child’s parent/s (Dahlquist *et al.* quoted in Tilhou 2020:89). Older learners’ curriculum content is more complex. These learners usually return to schools or parents enlist private tutors and online services for them (Jolly & Matthews 2020:275).

Christian Worldview and Pedagogy

Today’s Christian youth ‘is strongly influenced by contemporary cultural tendencies, often incompatible with a biblically based worldview’ (Van der Walt 2017:1 of 11). Hence, ‘stereotypes of religious homeschooling often involve parents creating brainwashed automatons, unable to think for themselves and either sequestered from society or determined to impose their worldview on others’ (Neuman 2020:567).

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A Christian worldview continuously needs to be renewed since it can become intellectualized, even adopted as an oppressive ideology. Sometimes it is misused to influence the power of a particular group and ultimately lose its biblical inspiration, replacing our relationship with God. If a *Christian worldview* has any element that disregards God's commandment, that is to love him, people, and his creation, then one does not have the right to add the term *Christian* anymore (Neuman 2020:568). The South African society has diverse worldviews, religions, and cultures and consequently there are many challenges regarding educational quality. Bowens (2020:28, 32) opines that 'Christian worldview development or formation is at the heart of Christian education'.

In view of South Africa's multiple denominational interpretation and expression of Christianity, the Christian worldview of HOMI (Heritage of Faith Ministries International) is applicable to this study, as it is reflected in the data². Christian parents (and their children) can make 'rational, informed, godly, school decisions' with the instruction, help, and support from Christian school administrators and their pastors (Prichard & Swezey 2016:20). Important is that the evangelical mission should not be the main emphasis to the

² Christian worldview on education:

We believe that God's original instruction to mankind concerning education is the foundation upon which we should build. Our worldview is based on God's Word. God instructed parents to take responsibility for their children's education. This education includes teaching and training their children in good character and strong moral values, as well as disciplined effort and excellence of work. This work ranges from basic chores within and around a home to reading, writing, arithmetic, art, and the work associated with any other subject being learned. The purpose of a parent is to teach and train a child how to self-govern in the home under God's representatives, the parents, so that when they come of age they continue self-governance outside of the home, under God and God's legitimate representatives in the church.

The church is instructed by God to teach and equip parents to fulfil this God-given responsibility and function, and to assist in any practical way in order to serve the family and the community. There is a strong partnership in education between the family and the church, keeping the best interest of the child as a central focus, so that the children may have the greatest opportunity to become what God purposed them to be.

extent that it is to the detriment of the mission of basic education (Wodon 2019:61).

The specific pedagogy one chooses, teaches learners as much as the chosen content. Thus Christian teachers' interest is to teach in the ways that are in line with their faith (Kieser & Parsons 2013:7). In the chosen curriculum, the Bible should not be regarded as 'a slice of the curriculum, one subject among many [but] the Word of God is to be core to every subject area' (Taylor 2022). Christian FBHS offers the learner the opportunity to do so in all subject areas and to apply it to their everyday lives.

According to Kieser and Parsons (2013:7-8), Christian teaching faces life critically in order to make changes where needed; second, it focuses on social justice, that is, equal opportunities for all; third, it is synoptic (human history's best, relating to God); and fourth, the educational experience as a whole is engaged, which includes the successes of teaching and learning. 'We believe Christians should help students see the world honestly and critically, and that a redemptive Christian pedagogy can be part of the critique of and dialogue within society' (Kieser & Parsons 2013:7).

The principle is that individuals who are redeemed in God's kingdom need to look at how they can use their potential to encourage restoration in a whole society (Mofield & Mofield 2022:89, 90). Where homes, schools, and churches work together with divine agencies, they prepare learners for responsible citizenship with regards to the present as well as the future world (Taylor 2022). Parents need to equip the learners in a world that is changing. It is therefore important that learners are trained to be problem-solvers, to be good communicators, and to think creatively. Working cooperatively is one way of achieving these skills as we read in Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (NIV): 'Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up'. In this way Christian FBHS learners can become fully equipped to be participative and contributing community members in a chaotic world and to discover their meaning in life.

Theoretical Framework

An impressive strength of home education is that many of the homeschoolers are intrinsically motivated to learn (Riley 2015:3). Intrinsic motivation is understood within the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of Deci and Ryan as a

human's tendency to naturally want to learn and to assimilate (Riley 2015:1). However, intrinsic motivation needs to be maintained and enhanced, being dependent on social and environmental conditions. A sub-theory of the SDT is the Cognitive Evaluation Theory, which addresses these factors and supports intrinsic motivation and psychological needs. These comprise competence, autonomy, and the relatedness of learners (Riley 2015:1, 3, 5). The need for competence is to be able to deal with the environment effectively, whereas the need for relatedness is to be able to interact with others, to care, to be connected, and to belong. The need for autonomy is to have a sense of willingness, to have a choice being causal agents, to have volition in order to be proactive, and have optimal development and psychological health (Deci & Vansteenkiste 2004:25-26).

The SDT differentiates types of motivation, of which autonomous and controlled motivation are central. Autonomous motivation comprises both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. With autonomous motivation one experiences volition or endorses one's own actions, whereas with controlled motivation there is an external regulation of one's behavior, with external sources sourcing from external functions such as reward and punishment, and includes approval, shame avoidance, self-esteem, and ego. Autonomous and controlled motivation directs one's behavior (Deci & Ryan 2008:182-183) and tends to lead to better psychological health and an effective performance of heuristic activities and persistence. It is important that learners recognize that grades indicate what content they have mastered and not that it measures their spirituality.

In Riley's study it was found that homeschooling can provide equal or even higher levels of competency, autonomy, and relatedness compared to other traditional forms of education (Riley 2015:21). External control, which is increasing all the time, high stakes testing, and having to adhere to core standards, are conditions that the SDT cautions as undermining the learners' autonomous motivation to learn. The longer the children are homeschooled, the higher their academic engagement and the higher their grade levels (Bell, Kaplan, & Thurman 2016:346).

Firmin, Younkin, Sackett, Fletcher, Jones, and Parrish (2019:44, 53) have determined that the educational success of the children of HS parents is attributed to parental catering and tailoring to the children's specific needs, parent-child bonding, and parents making special efforts to overcome the lack of the socialization typically associated with homeschoolers. The children

avoid negative peer pressure, since there is less interaction between the school and the home, and the parents have a dual role, being both parents and educators (Firmin *et al.* 2019:44, 53).

The Attachment Theory resonates well with the above findings. This theory refers to the ‘mental representations of the self in relation to significant others’ (Counted 2016:148), which develops early in the parent-child relationship and is active throughout life. A long relationship between two people (e.g., child and parent/s) indicates attachment bonds which ‘can be the genesis of a new faith experience with God’ (Counted 2016:148). Young people may develop a tight bond with God, which is an indication of an experience of a new relationship on their faith journey. Therefore, youth faith formation is considered a process of care-giving (Counted 2016:167). The ‘internal working models’ that develop during the experiences of parental attachment can form the framework for relationships in the future (Counted 2016:148-150). The homeschool environment is able to serve as fertile ground for the development of this framework, as the parent serves as parent, counsellor, teacher, and facilitator.

Not only should the youth regard God as an attachment figure and as remedying their emotional needs, but the church leaders should also disciple them to experience God and draw close to him and nurture their faith (Counted 2016:168). In this way they may realize that being close to God will enrich their spirit and soul and that they will be a ‘light of the world’ and also the ‘salt of the earth’ for the agenda of God in a dysfunctional world (Counted 2016:168). When a learner’s needs of attachment are not met as a result of an insecure attachment model in a relationship with God, then they should leave the faith community and look for a new caregiver, otherwise they could develop problems such as spiritual struggles and depression. A pastoral counsellor is needed to help the youth in a redemptive Christian community to grow spiritually and to develop a deeper relationship with God (Counted & Miller 2018:1 of 10).

Research Methodology

Qualitative methodology is employed in this article since the focus is on the participants’ perspective-in-context (cf. Van Schalkwyk & Bouwer 2011: 181). Data were collected from various sources such as observations, individ-

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ual semi-structured interviews (which were recorded with the participants' permission), field notes, a learner's video, and questionnaires. This enabled triangulation in data analysis. Member-checking was also employed by sharing our findings with the participants as a way to verify the credibility of the data.

For the purpose of this study, purposive sampling was employed. Purposeful sampling focuses on an in-depth understanding of, in this case, Christian FBHS (Patton 2002:46). In order to locate information-rich participants, we used snowball sampling by asking people who are well-situated and who can suitably inform us about Christian FBHS. We proceeded to ask more people to whom we could talk, in this way accumulating the snowball. The following participants were finally selected: Three secondary homeschoolers and their parents; three completed homeschoolers and their parents (all are married), and a pastor (as she counsels learners and their parents regarding HS choice and is involved with the MiXchange program)³. We conducted one-hour individual interviews with the learners and the pastor and we requested parents to complete a questionnaire and return it via e-mail. We requested a volunteer participant to prepare a video of his homeschooling environment experiences and used it as an alternative to direct observations (Table 1). Ethical clearance was applied for to conduct research from UNISA's Ethics Committee. An ethical clearance certificate was issued on July 5, 2023.

The participant learners and the pastor (female) were selected from the ecclesia of the Heritage of Faith Ministry (HOFM) of Pentecostal faith in the city of eMalahleni in the province of Mpumalanga, South Africa. The church leadership comprises a founder pastor (apostle C.E.O. Heritage of Faith Ministries, Africa) and connects to Heritage of Faith International (USA), his wife (senior pastor), his son (pastor), and a female pastor. The ecclesia comprises of members from eMalahleni, Morgenson, Clarence, Pretoria, Johannesburg, and Lenasia. The interviews were conducted at this

³ MiXchange (renamed *iXchange Life Internship*) is a process that facilitates encounters with God, growth in the Word, and the establishment of God-centered relationships. It is a time of a young person's life that they dedicate to seeking what the will of the Father is for their life. At iXchange, we are determined to change, to follow God, and to become who God has predestined us to become (iXchange 2023).

church with permission of the leader pastor. All learner participants attended public primary schools at some time. Once they reached high school level they chose to either continue schooling online or join a group class with tutors/one-on-one tutoring.

Table 1. Learner participant demographics

Key: A: African; W: White; F: Female; M: Male; HL: Home Language

Pseudonym	Race, gender, age	Parents' highest level of education	Socio-economic context	Current HS, grade/completed HS	Language background
PA	A, F, 19	Mother: BCom; Father: Pastor qualification	Average	HS complete: Gr 12	HL: English; Other: African language
PB	W, F, 19	Mother: BSc Hons, Biokinetics; Father: Master in sport sciences	High	HS complete: Gr 12	HL: Afrikaans; Other: English
PC	W, M, 19	Mother: PhD; Father: BSc (veterinary surgery)	High	HS complete: Gr 12	HL: Afrikaans; Other: English
PD	W, F, 17	Mother: Matric; Father: BTech Bachelor's degree	High	Current HS: Gr 11	HL: English; Other: Afrikaans
PE	A, F, 16	Mother: BCom; Father: Pastor qualifications	Average	Current HS: Gr 10	HL: English; Other: African language
PF	W, M, 18	Mother: PhD;	High	Current HS: Gr 12	HL: Afrikaans;

Pseudonym	Race, gender, age	Parents' highest level of education	Socio-economic context	Current HS, grade/completed HS	Language background
		Father: BSC (veterinary surgery)			Other: English

Data Analysis

Data were arranged according to types by means of manual color coding (Creswell 2009:184-189) under each specific theme: Theme 1: Choice in Christian FBHS; Theme 2: Christian homeschoolers' experiences and outcomes; Theme 3: The future for Christian homeschoolers. We interpreted the data under each theme.

Findings and Discussion

The main aim of this research was to gain an understanding of the complex factors that influence, in particular, the decisions of learners and their parents to do Christian FBHS. We extrapolated the responses from the data collection tools. The interview dates for participants PA, PB, PC, and Pastor C were July 24, 2023 and for PD, PE, and PF July 25, 2023.

Theme 1: Choice of Christian Faith-Based Homeschooling

The main research question and sub-question 1 were answered in this section. It emerged from the interview with the pastor (Ps C) that she believed that the role of the pastor is pivotal in the choice of parents and their children to do Christian FBHS as they act in the interest of the children, being led by the Holy Spirit. Prichard and Swezey (2016:20) have found that Christian parents can make 'rational, informed, godly, school decisions' with the help and support of Christian school administrators and their pastors. Ps C stated in her interview that 'the Holy Spirit is the only answer not to put your foot in a snare'.

In this study, we found that the parents were the initiators of FBHS for their children, driven by their Christian beliefs. Parents reported that they felt led by the Holy Spirit to start with Christian FBHS for their child/ren through the lens of a biblical worldview, putting God first. Parents D narrat-

ed: ‘We are constantly making him [God] part of the decision-making process and allowing them to follow his plan for their lives and not our own’. PD qualified her parents’ testimony, asserting that she felt in her spirit that God wanted her to do FBHS, evidencing that she was intrinsically motivated. According to the parent questionnaire responses they believed that they were acting in the best interest of their child/ren and were protecting them from the influences of the world-system. Parents A were confident that they made the right decision, ‘for a parent to homeschool them they need to know that they cannot do it apart from the Master himself [God] who knows what is best for each child’.

Apart from faith, which was the main reason for Christian FBHS, other driving forces in opting for Christian FBHS are provided by the parents (apart from their children’s own convictions about Christian FBHS). Parents shared that they want to ensure a safe home learning environment. The SDT sheds light on how a need-supportive social environment as well as education has an influence on one’s motivation and self-regulation of one’s behavior (Sansone & Tang 2021:113). PE experienced bullying, judging, labeling (such as being a ‘slow learner’), vulgar language, and racial slurs, which were added reasons for her to choose Christian FBHS. She experienced school as a very competitive space and felt that she was not getting the help she needed to support her learning needs. Such factors also influenced PA together with her parents, to choose Christian FBHS. In addition, they experienced the rigidity of the school system such as strict examination schedules; a limited curriculum and subject choices; negative teacher attitudes; peer pressure; and most importantly, the absence of biblical teachings and principles. Their aim was to integrate biblical knowledge within a tailor-made curriculum (selected from a variety of available curricula). PA claimed that although she was in a comfortable, accepting environment, she still made the HS choice. PC affirmed that although it was his parents’ initial choice for him to do Christian FBHS, he was afforded the final choice based on what he saw schools were doing to other children. Ps C added that money is also a factor influencing the choice of parents and their children to homeschool. By doing this, parents are leading their child/ren to an occupation where they could make the most money.

The participating parents were not the sole decision-makers as all of them claimed that they consulted with their children and the pastors of the HOFM, and once the parents and their children were in agreement, a final

decision was made on Christian FBHS. Ps C stated that God has a plan for each child: For some it means homeschooling and for others it means going to a formal school. PE explained that 'parents need to understand that HS is not for everyone. It is maybe for your kid, but it may not be for the parent. It is maybe for the parent, but not for the kid. It may not be for any of them, it may be for both'. Ps C opined that it should be a process of facilitation, nudging the child to make a choice, and to think for themselves as Jesus gave everybody a free will. With reference to the SDT, the need for autonomy means that one needs to be a causal agent, to have volition, and to act according to one's interests and values. This also implies that one needs others to assist them in making this decision (Deci & Vansteenkiste 2004:25).

The second sub-question focused on the impact that HS has on family life and socialization. Parents B explained that 'in our own home, we could direct the climate to a God-directed, positive, intentional growth orientated climate over against a group-management one-size-fits-all approach and climate'. They narrated that their daughter, PB was passionate about the role that the closeness of her family played in her Christian FBHS experience, always being there for her and being sensitive to her interests, learning styles, uniqueness, strengths, and weaknesses. PB claimed that their family bonds were strengthened by way of family prayer and worship time. Parents F shared their belief with us 'that we as parents are divinely appointed and sacredly abled to educate our own children'. PF confirmed in his interview, that as a result, he has a strong foundation that has enabled him to relate to people with the same principles as his. These parents and their children believed that the Bible mandated the parents the responsibility to teach and train their children, as stated in Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Ephesians 6:4, and Proverbs 22:6. Hence God has equipped parents to do so. The research done by Pietersma (2021:80) further expounds on these biblical principles, showing the benefits to children whose parents take their education seriously. Kovacs (2016:6) explains that children with better attachment relationships use their attachment figures, being a secure base for them, to explore their physical world as well as their ideas and their values. In so doing they are able to form quality intellect and identity that contribute to a mature, flourishing life. It became clear in the interviews that the children in this study had strong attachment bonds with their parents, making it possible for them to feel confident in exploring new ideas and learning new things. We conclude that notwithstanding the important role that HS parents play and that family bonds are strength-

ened, it is not to say that parents of children in public schools do not fulfil the same responsibilities, uphold biblical principles and have strong family bonds, taking into account their different circumstances.

We give credence to PC's input, 'What homeschooling did do, is it gave us more opportunity as a family to dig into going into the Word, into how we are relating, how we all fit in together, how it's applicable to us, how we apply'. Hence, we are of the opinion that the SDT and the Attachment Theory are applicable in the Christian FBHS discourse, where intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (autonomous and controlled motivation), psychological needs, namely competence, autonomy, and relatedness, and attachment bonds clearly feature and form the bedrock of the study.

Theme 2: Christian Homeschoolers' Experiences and Outcomes

Highlights from each participant learner's experiences and outcomes are presented as they emerged in the interviews and serve as further evidence and substantiation of the findings presented in theme 1.

PA compared her HS environment with her institutional school environment. In school, teachers were so harsh and impatient, which caused fear of being wrong and giving up; in HS it is the opposite. Her parents enabled her to gain confidence, to think critically, to work hard and to gain endurance. She believed that it is a fallacy that HS do not gain social skills, as she was adamant that her parents taught her social skills. In sum she explained that HS and being a Christian, serving others was her choice. Nobody forced her.

PA narrated further, 'Sometimes being denied that outside interaction with lots of your peers...you long for those typical teenage memories. You don't feel like making teenage memories with your little sister. She is too small'. She thus expressed a need for people to be around her and to be able to participate in a team sport. Notwithstanding this need, she realized she still needed to have boundaries and to set goals and to be intrinsically motivated to meet those goals. Subsequently she requested her parents to be tutored by a tutor/teacher and eventually she was enrolled in a school. Her perception of HS is, 'Homeschooling is generally good. It does not mean the school system is bad'. Some people were homeschooled and did not make it as it was not meant for them and therefore 'homeschooling is not the ultimate solution'.

PB had the experience of attending the local primary school at the age of six. During the transition to Christian FBHS, her mother exposed her to many subjects and it was challenging. She initially was able to choose

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which subjects she was good at and enjoyed and chose the most suited subject package. Time, pace, and flexibility in HS suited her as she could manage her daily time and cope well. PB's parents and brother were very involved in her tuition and were always there to support her. Consequently there was a tight family bond that developed.

PB became very aware of the socialization stereotypes towards homeschooling. Due to her dancing and her brother's tennis activities, they were surrounded by other children and had the opportunity to socialize. They were also able to participate in public school sport activities. During high school she attended classes with tutors and had the opportunity to socialize with the other learners in the class. In the Christian FBHS environment her faith was able to grow as they would start the day with prayer and speak words of faith. She was also very involved in community engagement such as evangelistic outreaches as well as at the church, where she also attended Bible school.

PC attended an Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) school during his early years (where his mother was the principal). The classes were small, each learner having a cubicle to work in on their own, and different grades in one classroom with supervisors. They had the learning material, they could continue learning by themselves, and ask the supervisor to help when needed. They would work on different levels, but would ultimately arrive on the same level as per the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) requirements. After Grade 7, PC was exposed to different curricula such as Cambridge. He learnt to manage the system by setting goals and attending to due dates that afforded him more time. He attempted the Independent Examination Board (IEB) curriculum in Grade 9. However, the chopping and changing of curricula resulted in, for example, foundation gaps in mathematics, which necessitated him to attend individual lessons in the last two years, yielding good fruits: 'Applying my faith to getting where I was...to be diligent and disciplined...I had to teach myself how to study...you get to learn how to write tests. You get to know what they are asking you'. Although he never saw his online teachers (faith-based Christian school) he got to know them well and he was able to apply his faith.

PC was able to participate in other activities besides academics such as gymnastics, soccer, and piano lessons. During his Christian FBHS years he learnt to manage his time well and to fit in all the activities as it suited him – his time was flexible. PC was also involved with church activities such as

outreaches to foster homes and missionary work. In terms of socialization, he explained that he needed social interaction. However, HS was not a big adjustment as there were HS members who joined him especially at church where he socialized with them.

PD was taught by her parents when she was little and later on she switched to online schooling as the pace suited her. She had a tutor (being a Christian) whom she loved and who taught her well ‘through the Word of God’. Her mathematics mark improved considerably as a result of the tutor’s assistance. She learnt to manage her time and was able to make time for piano lessons. However, she professed that ‘I still need to develop in my discipline’ as she did not participate in sport and needed to exercise, e.g., with horse riding lessons.

As a homeschooler she was constantly in her family’s presence, and they were able to help her when necessary with things like ‘my dishonesty or lack of confidence with myself’ and building her character. PD felt that in homeschooling she learnt self-development, using her gifts and becoming people orientated. Her father played an important role in the family as he was the ‘base’ in the family and shared the Word of God with them. PD declared, ‘Homeschooling did definitely help me in my Christian faith, developing character, and godly input through my parents and through the church and things like that. I feel that I am a person in the word of God’.

Regarding socialization, PD did not feel that she was missing out as most of her friends were in church which she attended regularly. She also did an online course where she was able to communicate with other learners. However, she felt that it could also corrupt good character. During school holidays she spent time at church where she was able to work on her laptop. She also joined the other youth going through the pastor’s messages. PD experienced that being planted in the church meant for her that most of their activities centered on the church where they were able to socialize with other Christian homeschoolers (forging lifetime friendships).

PE stated that she enjoyed the freedom of choice in the HS environment such as doing mathematics instead of another subject for the day. Her socialization started at home, having sisters. She did express that in Grade 8 her need was to have friends of her age and to attend school, but then she started online schooling and she knew, ‘I have got my peers, it felt good and the whole exam thing, that was awesome. So, sometimes I am like, there are days when I wish I was in school – if I was at school, it would be a bit differ-

ent'. As her mother is teaching them, but also has clients, she and her sisters are considering to return to school. PE was diagnosed with a rare illness and she missed a year of schooling. In grade 10 she did the American curriculum named Power School, which offers a wide choice of subjects. She explained that FBHS is the same setting as a school. The difference is that there are other learners in the class and it does not mean one is gifted or not. PE did express her feeling that she was missing out on the social aspect and had the desire to be part of her peers in a formal school.

PF explained that he was faced with and exposed to different curricula, which enabled him to choose a curriculum that suited his learning style and fast pace his learning. In Christian FBHS he learnt to look for answers, to decipher, and to evaluate as he studied the Bible and even studied Greek. He explained that he was able to manage his time well as his interruptions were minimized. He was able to participate in sport, music, and gymnastics and ultimately enter a career earlier, reach goals quicker and easier, and make choices in life.

With regard to PF's socialization, he explained that he could integrate with diverse aged children resulting in more social awareness. He enjoyed the spiritual side of Christian FBHS where he had time for daily prayers, to study Sunday sermon messages, and attend Bible school. In addition, he played in a band and in so doing could minister to others and they to him, at the same time. Thus, most of his activities were concentrated on church activities and people.

For all the learner participants, their experiences during HS were positive. However, one participant did express her wish to return to a public school as she missed social interaction and the structured environment, for example, writing examinations with other learners. In this study an integral part of the participants' HS was the faith-based lens and family bond, which were the main deciding factors that contributed to their positive Christian FBHS experiences.

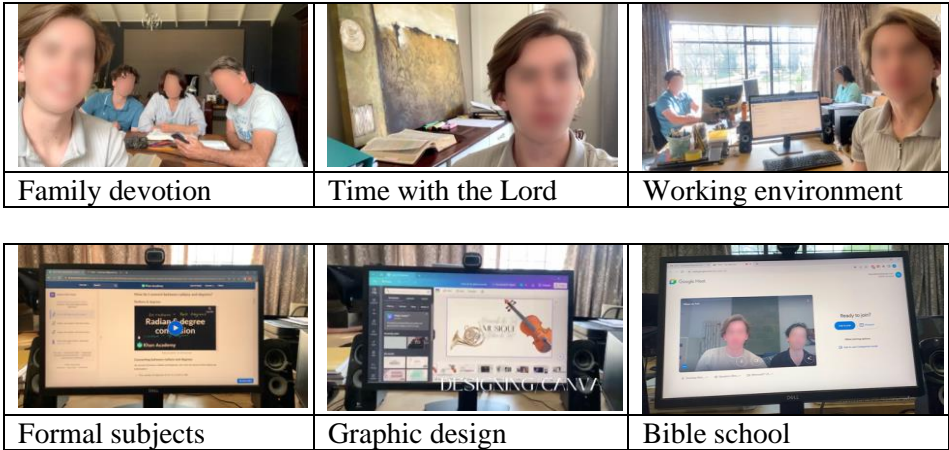


Figure 1: PF’s video screenshots of everyday FBHS situations and interactions (PF granted permission to publish these screenshots).

Theme 3: The Future for Christian Homeschoolers

Parents of FBHS children can be sure that their children are saved and converted as there is a correlation between home education and strong Christian beliefs and their behaviors during adulthood. Limited research does show positively that homeschooling led by parents passes on the Christian faith to their children (Ray 2024:18). Ray (2021:68) advises that ‘educators should be promoting anything that is good for children’s academic achievement, social and emotional development, and success into adulthood’.

As the participants shared their aspirations for their future adult life, the common denominator was the fact that God will lead them in their decision to follow a career and what the future holds for them. Keeping in mind that all participants were enrolled in the MiXchange program at the church (research site), it does not mean that they were all called to the ministry. There are those who had a calling to the ministry, for example PD, while others had dreams to follow a career in different areas of life. Careers that participants considered or definitely chose (once they exited the MiXchange program) included studying business and the corporate world: ‘I could say my dream career is being the light’ (PA); to study professional dancing in Europe, however, she is leaning strongly towards ministry (PB); to study civil/mechanical engineering or farming, however, he also sees his future being

linked to ministry (PC); to go to Paris and study photography/IT/art (PE); having an art talent, PF was interested in animation involving texture and movement in a teaching capacity in the ministry.

By reflecting on the different future aspirations these homeschoolers have, we arrived at the conclusion that whether children attend public/private schools or HS, they all have future aspirations that are not different to any other children in society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The data gleaned by means of the data collection tools in this study, have provided valuable information regarding Christian FBHS for this article, despite the sample size being too small to generalize to the larger population. We looked at a group of six Christian FBHS learners who attended the same church and were part of its MiXchange program.

This research did not only focus on pedagogical practices and curricula, as it also included diverse aspects of the daily lives of the learners (Neuman & Guterman 2017:160) making it a wholistic pedagogical approach in which all aspects of life became part of their learning experiences. Hence the homeschoolers' choice justified a wholistic perspective of the significance of their Christian FBHS that was also applicable for this study. The conservative Christian FBHS parents believed that educating their children was a responsibility and right given by God. The views of the parents in this study echoed those of Kunzman (2010:23) who argues that it is about developing character by inculcating a Christian worldview which enables children to guide their moral choices.

Children are learning, driven by intrinsic motivation and self-determination and not because they just want to pass their Grades, be recognized by a school (Riley 2021:94), or because their psychological needs have been met, which was evident in this study. They were intrinsically motivated and driven by their Christian faith. However, autonomous and controlled motivation can both feature simultaneously. With reference to the Attachment Theory, all the learner participants emphasized their strong family bonds, which were forged during Christian FBHS, as they felt that socialization begins in the family and continues in the church with fellow Christians. A close bond was formed with God and spiritual leaders and first transcended to the

biological family, which forms a ripple effect in all other relationships in their lives.

In this study the pastor, parent, and child, formed a triadic relationship in which they believed they were guided by the Holy Spirit to arrive at the choice of Christian FBHS. Ps C's conviction, based on Scripture, is to train one's child in order to make rational, informed, and godly decisions for their child/ren's education. In comparison the children, parents, and pastor in this study felt that in the institutional schools, people, other than the children, decide for the child what they should learn, at what pace, when, and where. They also felt that there was a greater focus on peer-orientated bonding which often undermined family cohesion.

For the parents and pastor it was imperative that their child/ren also had a say in the decision-making of their schooling. They based this on their understanding that Jesus gives everyone a free will, and thus the role of both the pastor and the parents is to facilitate the choice process. Van Schalkwyk and Boucher (2011:179) have found that learners' views corresponded to some extent with homeschool educators, but also pointed out significant differences, as some participants experienced 'uneasiness' and 'unhappiness' (Van Schalkwyk & Boucher 2011:182). Despite parents' beliefs that they were acting in their children's best interests, they were often oblivious of their needs and thus unable to accommodate them, as experienced by one of the participants. The latter cautioned that HS is not for everybody and that there is a desire for more socialization with peers.

Although there are many factors that influence the choice of both parents and learners to FBHS, the main driving force for them in this study was based on their Christian faith and their understanding of biblical principles. Parents and the pastor believed that they facilitate the choice process regarding Christian FBHS by the leading of the Holy Spirit. Subsequently they chose Christian FBHS to pass on and preserve their faith. They believed that in Christian FBHS their children were able to gain Christian values and morals, to develop a worldview separate from secular worldviews and influences, and develop a Christian character enabling them to live a Christian life – to be 'the salt of the earth' and a 'light to the world'.

Other driving forces for participants in this study to do HS included bad experiences in institutional schools such as bullying. For them, having a strong family bond and a safe home environment was preferable to institutional schools. In the Christian FBHS system their faith could support their

academics and all aspects of their lives. Parents felt that their children's needs were catered for on an individual level. The learners reported finding it helpful that in the Christian FBHS their strengths and weaknesses were significantly engaged including their different modalities (e.g., visual and auditory) and learning styles. Learners and parents reported that because time is flexible in Christian FBHS, this develops good time management skills for both parents and children. The wider choice of curricula was regarded as a significant benefit. There are different models of HS to choose from – from private tutors to online lessons. Parents and children reported finding it beneficial for children to have a choice to socialize with like-minded people and peers in the church family, rather than having to socialize with a vast number of people in institutional schools, most of whom did not share their values.

In view of the results of this study, the participants were able to dispel the stereotypes associated with Christian FBHS such as inhibiting socialization. Ray (2016:31-32) argues that there is consistent 'parent-guided social interaction for children and youth' in any HS system. The learner participants were able to attend different activities such as music lessons and girl guides, and participate in institutional school activities such as sport. They generally developed good time management skills. Consequently there was sufficient time for them to participate in these activities, to learn life skills, to become acquainted with technology, to enroll for extra courses of interest, and to qualify for university entrance. Some learner participants wanted to pursue a career and attend higher education, and always being able to minister God's Word or to attend their church program 'MiXchange', while others were intending to serve in the ministry.

Although Section 51 of the South African Schools Act (SASA), 84 of 1996 does make provision for parents to apply and register for HS for their children, researchers of HS need to become well-versed with the contents regarding HS and the regulations that will be contained in the BELA Bill. Research is called for in an effort to protect the fundamental rights of home-school learners, and that government needs to support the homeschool system with no 'tight restrictions' (Mutlokwa 2022:2). However, there is hope that the latest proposals for legislative reform may help advocates of HS to test 'the constitutionality of clauses in the BELA related to home-schooling in the courts' (Mutlokwa 2022:7). Homeschooling organizations such as the Pestalozzi Trust can be approached to conduct continued research and serve the

Basic Department of Education with valuable findings and to form FBHS communities of practice.

There is a need for further empirical research also considering other religions and to conduct comparative studies based on Christian FBHS. The findings can contribute to providing evidence that contradicts clauses regarding homeschooling in the BELA Bill (when passed into law) and can be challenged to amend homeschooling based on all the factors that are taken into consideration in this study (Mutlokwa 2022:22). Nowadays, a hybridization of homeschooling approaches and many curriculum delivery options are available to parents that calls for cooperation between public schools and homeschooling families (Jolly & Matthews 2020:276) that should be mandated by legislation.

Since HS is more common nowadays, it necessitates educational professionals to provide the parents with answers that are well-founded as well as guidance regarding FBHS. Policymakers, parents, religious, and non-religious leaders who promote homeschooling for their ‘pedagogical and family-life practices that benefit children’ (Ray 2021:68) are the stakeholders who can contribute to the sustainability and promotion of FBHS. The findings regarding the FBHS choice of Christian learners and their parents point to most importantly conserving and living their Christian faith; guarding against interfering, contaminating worldviews; inculcating biblical principles in their chosen curricula; determining factors that influence their Christian FBHS; and offer recommendations that can be adopted by education authorities.

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