

Homeschooling in Australia: the context, power and identity

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Abstract

Recent years have seen a steady growth in homeschooling as an alternative form of schooling in Australia. One may argue that the pandemic is a reason for this increase, but the trend was noted well before it. Homeschooling is legal in Australia with a requirement of registration with the education department in the respective state or territory. The Department of Education websites of each state and territory provide information on the registration processes and resources for families and students. Through a discourse analysis of e-platforms owned by the Education Department of each state and territory, this paper compares their stance for supporting homeschooling. Some believe that strict regulations can lead to parents' disengagement with the government, but we argue that the government should strategically support these parents and students through uniform policies and financial assistance.

Keywords: Home-schooling, policy analysis, support mechanisms, discourse analysis

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Introduction

Homeschooling has been growing at a fast pace in the US, UK, Australia, Hungary, France, Japan, Thailand, Russia, Mexico, Kenya, South Korea and Canada (Ray, 2025, January 27). Ray (2013, 2021b) defines homeschooling as home-based, and parent-led private education. Mountney (2009) in her book “Learning without school: Home Education” defines homeschooling as having the onus of education on the parents and educating children without sending them to school as according to her going to school is not mandatory, it is education which is mandatory. The first schools in Australia were home schools started in 1788 as “Dame Schools” (Harding & Farrell, 2003). Formal schooling became the standard method of education in Australia after the economic crisis ended in 1937 (Chapman & O’Donoghue, 2000). The concept of homeschooling has seen a resurgence in the past decades (Long, 2001; Ray, 2021a). The years after the pandemic saw a further increase in the number of students being home-schooled in Australia and the rest of the world. Australia along with other nations have a legal obligation to international human rights treaties like United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR 1948) and The Convention of the Rights of the Child (CROC 1990) to offer compulsory education in elementary school to ensure the overall development of the human personality, and parents given the freedom to choose the method of education suitable for their child (Jackson & Allan, 2010; Lindsay, 2003). Australia being a democratic federal government, the commonwealth, state and territory governments have different roles to perform.

Homeschooling parents choose this form of alternative education for various reasons, including proactive and reactive reasons. Some parents take a proactive approach and start education with homeschooling, whereas some other parents homeschool because of reactive

reasons due to parents or children being unhappy with formal education (Mountney, 2009).

English (as cited in Payne, 2024, September 20) refers to them as “deliberates” and “accidentals.”

When parents choose homeschooling for their children it is a tough decision to make and some of these parents have genuine reasons for making this choice. If guided in the proper manner there are many advantages while homeschooling which includes learning structure, learning preferences, no bullying, cater to learning styles, personal attention, no teacher favouritism and related issues, comfortable and safe learning environments, self-motivation, increased social development and maturity due to interactions with adults, opportunity to learn in the wider environment while going on field trips etc. (Mountney, 2009). In a similar vein, a wide range of studies have revealed positive outcomes (Ray, 2021b) on homeschooling including better communication and leadership skills (Ray, 2013; Murphy, 2014), high self-esteem (Jackson & Allan, 2010), greater social opportunities (Jackson, 2011; Jackson & Allan, 2010), high academic achievement (Chapman & O’Donoghue, 2000; Cooper, 2007; Harding & Farrell, 2003; Jackson, 2007; Long, 2001; Martin-Chang et al., 2011; Mc Donald & Lopes, 2014; Murphy, 2013; Murphy, 2014; Nicholls, 1997; Ray, 2013; Ray, 2017; Ray, 2018) and ease of gaining admission to reputed institutions, higher maturity levels and fewer behavioural problems (Murphy, 2014). However, Mountney (2009) opines that students do not learn more or less while being homeschooled or while attending main stream schools. They just learn differently, and the homeschooling experience depends more on the perspectives and motivation level of parents. Slater et al. (2023) showed patterns of demographic data such as highly educated female parents between 31 and 50 years of age homeschooled children aged between 6 to 14 years. Research also shows that homeschooling students' experience depends on parents' commitment (Mountney, 2009) and that majority of homeschooling educators are females (Slater et al., 2020;

Slater et al.,2023; Susan,2000; Trembley et al.,2024). Thus, supporting these homeschooling families help empower women.

The extant literature on homeschooling shows polarised views between the advocates and the critiques. Advocates show the benefits of homeschooling for diverse reasons, and they highlight the need for a more sustainable systemic support system in every state and territory to provide enriched experience for children and young people. On the other hand, critiques argue that more support for homeschooling can encourage more people to homeschool their children. This paper analysed Department of Education e-platforms of each state and territory and recent papers to further understand this conundrum to draw more insights into homeschooling. The research questions under exploration were: What support systems are in place to homeschool children and families? Does Australia support home schoolers equitably?

Methods: Discourse analysis

Discourse Analysis (DA) is qualitative and is an interdisciplinary method where researchers analyse the language and meanings of written documents or texts (Gee, 2010, Johnstone & Andrus, 2024;). It is a flexible approach where researcher can analyse texts, its meaning based on the research topic and aims of the study (Tsindos,2023). It permits researchers to interpret language in a broader social and political context. DA provides an iterative process to deductively and inductively analyse texts at different levels to draw insights into the topic being investigated. The study used eight e-platforms regulated by eight Departments of Education to obtain data for this study and it also used the sources from The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2023) to obtain quantitative data. All the e-platforms were analysed using the steps of DA; context (gathering superficial information for home schoolers), power (how homeschooling has been depicted in each e-platform) and identity (overall impact for homeschooling and shaping of

their identities) (Gee, 2010). The following sections of this paper provide the findings of this study followed by a discussion examining the identities of home schooler and issues surrounding homeschooling.

Context: Homeschooling statistics in Australia

The Estimated Resident Population in Australia in 2023 was 26,966,789 in the statistics released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics on 31st Dec 2023. The annual growth rate was 2.5% with 651,200 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). In comparison to 2022, there

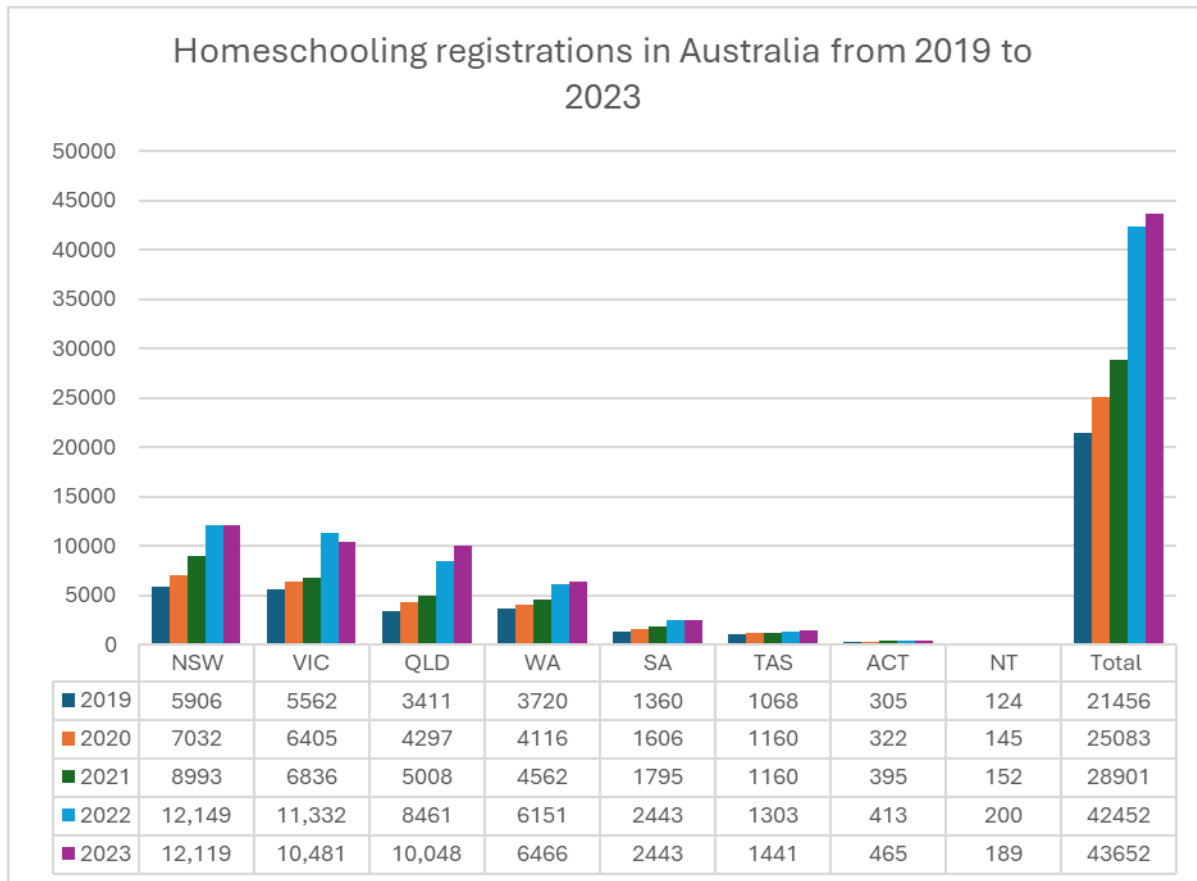


Figure 1: Registered homeschooling students in Australia from 2019 to 2023

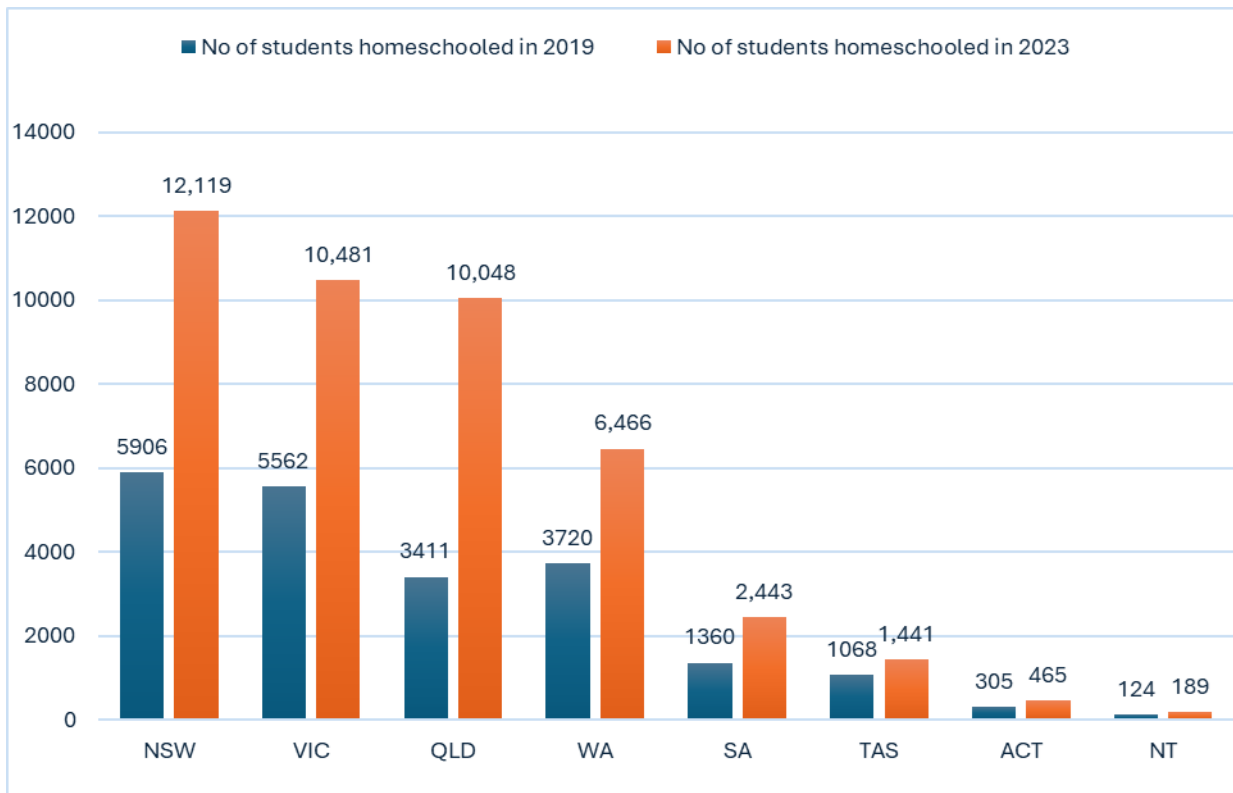
was an increase of 44,486 students across Australia in 2023. As per the data released on 14th February 2024 for the reference period 2023, 4,086,998 students were enrolled in schools across Australia in government and non-government schools (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Figure 1 summarises the number of homeschooling students in the six states and two territories in Australia from 2019 to 2023. In the year 2019, there were 21,456 students who were homeschooled in Australia. Following the global trend, Australia too has seen a growth in the number of homeschooled students each year. In 2023, after the pandemic the number of homeschooled students in Australia doubled to 43,652. Almost every state and territory saw an increase in the number of homeschooled students every year, except New South Wales and Victoria where the number reduced from 12,149 in 2022 to 12,119 in 2023 in New South Wales and 11,332 in 2022 to 10,481 in 2023 in Victoria. This could be attributed to the students returning to mainstream schools from homeschooling during the pandemic years. In 2022 and 2023, the homeschooling numbers stayed stagnant in South Australia with 2,443 students homeschooled for both years. Tasmania witnessed a similar trend in 2020 and 2021 where the homeschooled students were 11,60 for both years. However, overall homeschooling numbers in

Australia show a clear upward trend. The data given in Figure 1 and Figure 2 are retrieved from various sources including state and territory government websites as follows: NSW: New South Wales Education Standards Authority, NSW (2022, 2024); VIC: Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023); QLD: Department of Education, QLD (2023); WA: Department of Education, WA (2022, 2023); SA: Couper & Harding (2024); TAS: Department of Education (2019, 2021, 2022, 2023); ACT: Education Directorate, ACT (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023); NT: Couper & Harding (2024).

Figure 2: Comparison between the number of students homeschooled in 2019 and 2023

Context & Power: Homeschooling Registration Policy Analysis



Homeschooling as an alternative form of education is recognised in all states and territories in Australia. The registration policies and procedures vary and are on a spectrum ranging from states like New South Wales and Western Australia having a more structured approach with strict registration requirements and Tasmania and South Australia being more flexible with no mandatory requirement to follow a curriculum. Though homeschooling is regulated in Australia the registration policies and regulations differ in each state and territory. Since many Australian residents move inter-state for employment, the inconsistencies in the registration policy causes problems for students, parents and teachers. Some students in Australia move back and forth from homeschooling to mainstream schools and there is a huge impact on teachers trying to integrate these students into the mainstream classrooms. There is evidence that many students who opt for homeschooling in Australia return to mainstream schools at some point. Teachers may encounter a variety of problems with the students who transition between mainstream schools to homeschooling and vice versa (English, 2016). The homeschooling registration policies across states and territories in Australia are discussed below.

New South Wales

A parent who wishes to home-school their children must be residing in New South Wales. Children between the mandatory age of school education, 6 to 17 years are eligible to register for home-schooling. Applications for registration must be made to NESA (NSW Education Standards Authority) Homeschooling Unit. Parents need to make a study plan based on the NSW NESA Syllabus while applying for registration. An Authorised Person (AP) is assigned and after assessing the study plan the AP approves the registration. Approval can take up to 90 days depending on the time of the year. Parents receive a Registration Certificate from NESA once registration is confirmed. Part time homeschooling is not an option in New South

Wales. From 29th April 2024, new homeschooling registrations need to be assessed by a home visit by an approved by an AP. Guidelines for homeschooling registration in NSW referred to as ‘The Guidelines’ provide all information necessary to homeschool children in NSW, including the registration process, requirements to be met, NSW State Curriculum to be followed and links to access other relevant information. Distance Education registration and homeschooling registration are different in NSW. In Distance Education, the child is enrolled in a school which offers a Distance Education program, and resources are sent via emails or electronic means. Children should be 5 years on or before 31st July of the year and registered until they are 18 years of age. These students get an extension for two more years for the purpose of completing their schooling (Department of Education New South Wales, 2024).

Victoria

Homeschooling is free and legal for families who wish to home-school their children in the state of Victoria. It is a mandatory requirement that the family must be residing in Victoria to be eligible for registration. Children between the ages of 6 and 17 only can be home-schooled. Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) is the Victoria Government’s home-education regulator. When applying for registration, parents must attach the study plan and resources they propose to use to home-school their child. VRQA regulates Homeschooling through the responsibilities laid down by the Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Act), Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017 (Regulations), and the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Charter). If registration is approved, parents receive a Certificate of Registration. Parents can partially enrol children to a school on the discretion of the School Principal (Victorian Registrations and Qualifications Authority, n.d.).

Queensland

Queensland offers free and legal homeschooling option for students aged between 5 years and 6 months to 18 years of age on 31st December. Parents can choose between two types of registration, provisional or short-term registration of 60 days and long-term registration. Application is made to the Home Education Unit (HEU). These children should not be enrolled in a school. Home-school registration can be surrendered by filling an online form (Queensland Department of Education, 2023). In March 2024, Queensland Education Minister introduced a legislation that all homeschooling students will have to follow the Australian Curriculum due to the spike in homeschooling numbers (Jenkins, 2024). Home Education Australia (HEA) raised concerns that this would lead to parents homeschooling their children without registering with the regulatory body. After a parliamentary committee meeting with stakeholders in the education sector the Queensland Education Minister Di Farmer announced the withdrawal of the reforms from the bill due to the impact on homeschooling families, teachers and children (Meacham, 2024, Apr 16).

South Australia

In the state of South Australia, it is a legal requirement of The Department of Education and Child Development (DECD) that children aged between 6 and 17 years of age residing in South Australia must attend a school in the state. Thus, homeschooling students need to be enrolled in a school to get an exemption and continue with home-schooling. Application is made for an exemption and not for registration. There is no part time registration available, but language classes can be arranged in schools. The Department of Education is not obliged to provide support and resources to support homeschooling families. Parents must participate in a meeting with a Home-Education staff member to discuss the process before exemption can be

obtained. Once exemption is granted a review process happens every 12 months. Department of Education must be notified of any change in homeschooling within 14 days (Department of Education South Australia, 2024).

Western Australia

The Department of Education, Western Australia, places the onus on the homeschooling parents to prepare the Curriculum which meets the requirements of the School's Curriculum and Standards Authority Act 1997. Resources and links are available for homeschooling families as a guidance. Parents need to track the progress of the child and show the child's progress on a regular basis. Homeschooling families should be residents of Western Australia. Students between the age of 5 years and 6 months and 17 years and 6 months can be home-schooled. If leaving a school to be home-schooled, parents must notify the principal and register for homeschooling within 14 days of last attendance (Department of Education, Western Australia, n.d.).

Tasmania

Under the Education Act 2016 parents in Tasmania can choose to homeschool their children and take the responsibility of their studies during the compulsory education period, 5 years as on 1st January until they turn 18 years of age. However, after age 16, parents need to advise the Registrar whether the child will be continuing homeschooling or opting for an approved learning program. Part time enrolment is possible for 2 days a week for homeschooling students in Tasmania. The Office of the Education Registrar (OER) manages the registration of homeschooling students in Tasmania. The OER has created a resource called 'Understanding the Standards' to support parents in preparing a Home Education Summary and Program (HESP)– a plan that addresses the 10 standards located in the Education Regulations 2017. An individual

HESP must be written for each child being home schooled and they must be approved by the Registrar. The HESP must be rewritten every year before the renewal date of registration. In Tasmania there is no mandatory requirement for the homeschooling parent to follow any Curriculum, including the Australian Curriculum. Thus, more flexibility is offered for homeschooling parents and children. Application for registration can be made through the Service Tasmania website.

Northern Territory

Homeschooling parents in the Northern Territory must apply for approval from the Department of Education, Northern Territory (NT). Homeschooling is possible for children aged between 6-17 years. Part time home-schooling enrolment is available only for students in Year 10-12. The child must be enrolled and attending school until homeschooling has been approved. Every year homeschooling approval must be renewed. Parents can prepare the study plan or employ a qualified teacher who must be registered with the Teacher Registration Board of Northern Territory and have a Working with Children Clearance (OCHRE card) to prepare a plan and deliver the program at home. New homeschooling students can apply for registration at any time of the year, but there are set dates for continuing students who intend to homeschool in year 10 to 12. If the family is planning on travelling for short periods, they need to discuss with the Home-Education Team. If travelling for an extended period parents can apply to enrol the child in a Distance Education School (Department of Education Northern Territory, 2024).

Australian Capital Territory

The Education Act 2004 (The ACT) offers parents in the ACT the freedom to choose the mode of educating their children as per the need of the child (Education Directorate Australian Capital Territory, n.d.). Parents can fill out the online registration form with the relevant ID

documents and ACT proof of residence. Parents can start homeschooling their children as soon as the application for registration is sent, as the approval can take up to 28 days. A statement of intent must be submitted within three months of applying for registration or with the application. The Statement of Intent will outline how homeschooling will be implemented, the strategies used and how the quality of education offered at home will ensure the education offered is consistent with the principles outlined in The Education Act 2004 (the Act), section 128 (d). Once the registration process is complete, parents receive a Registration Certificate for each child enrolled. Within three months of registration, parents have an online discussion with an ACT Education Directorate Authorised person about compliance during the period of registration and upon his approval can continue homeschooling their children. ACT Education Directorate also offers parents the opportunity to register part time with a private or public school while homeschooling their children (Education Directorate Australian Capital Territory, n.d.).

HOMESCHOOLING POLICY AND REGULATIONS IN THE STATES AND TERRITORIES IN AUSTRALIA						
STATES OR TERRITORIES	AGE LIMIT	REGULATORY BODY	EDUCATION ACT	REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS	CURRICULUM RESOURCES	PART TIME ENROLMENT
New South Wales	6 to 17 years (extension of up to 2 years possible to complete schooling)	NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA)	Education Act 1990	From 29 th April 2024, applications for initial HS registration will be assessed by home visit by an authorised person. Parents must make a study plan based on NSW NESA Syllabus. Parents receive a Registration Certificate once approved.	https://www.nsw.gov.au/education-and-training/nesa/home-schooling/educational-programs/syllabus-support	Part time homeschooling is not an option in NSW
Victoria	6 to 17 years	Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA)	The Education and Training Reform Act 2006 and The Education	Parents must attach study plan and resources along with the application to VRQA. If registration is	https://www2.vrqa.vic.gov.au/access-support-and-resources-home-education	Partial enrolment possible on the discretion of the principal

			and Training Reform Regulations 2017	approved parents receive a Registration Certificate.		
Queensland	5 years and 6 months to 18 years on 31 st December	Home Education Unit (HEU)	The Education (General provisions) Act 2006	Application made to the Home Education Unit. parents receive a Registration Certificate. Amendments made in March 2024 – not a law yet (submit a plan with the application, Australian Curriculum will be the standard). Reforms were withdrawn in April 2024, and a Home School Advisory Group is proposed to be established (Meacham, 2024, Apr.16).	https://education.qld.gov.au/schools-educators/other-education/home-education https://ppr.qed.qld.gov.au/pp/home-education-in-queensland-procedure	No guidelines on partial enrolment

<p>South Australia</p>	<p>6 to 17 years</p>	<p>Education Standards Board, Department of Education and Child Development (DECD)</p>	<p>The Education Act 1972</p>	<p>Compulsory enrolment in school. Application for exemption from school and not registration. Department of Education is not obliged to provide support and resources. Review processes every 12 months. Homeschooling is not for students who are travelling. Any change must be notified within 14 days.</p>	<p>https://www.education.sa.gov.au/docs/curriculum/guide-to-home-education-in-south-australia.pdf</p>	<p>No part time exemption except for language classes</p>
<p>Western Australia</p>	<p>5 years and 6 months to 17 years and 6 months</p>	<p>The Department of Education, WA</p>	<p>The School Education Act 1999</p>	<p>If leaving a school parents need to notify the principal and register for homeschooling within 14 days. Application for registration</p>	<p>https://www.education.wa.edu.au/home-schooling Parents need to prepare the curriculum which meets the requirements of the School's Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA) Act 1997.</p>	<p>Part time homeschooling is not an option in WA</p>

				<p>must be submitted and once approved, parents receive a Registration Certificate. More responsibility on the parents. Resources and links are available on the website for the parents to access.</p>		
Tasmania	5 to 17 years	Office of the Education Registrar. Home Education Summary and program (HESP) submitted for each child being homeschooled	The Education Act 2016 and the Education Regulations 2017	Registration can be made through Service Tasmania website. OER has created a resource to support parents ‘Understanding the standards’ to support parents to write a Home Education Summary and Program (HESP). HESP must be written	https://oer.tas.gov.au/home-education/ No mandatory requirement to follow a curriculum	Part time enrolment possible for 2 days a week

				for every year for each child who is being homeschooled before registration renewal date.		
Northern Territory	6 to 17 years	Northern Territory Department of Education	The Education Act Northern Territory 2015 (NT)	Child must be enrolled and attending school until getting approval. Approval must be renewed every year. Parents can prepare a study plan or employ a registered teacher who has an OCHRE Card. Short term travel plans must be discussed with the Home Education team. If travelling for extended period, child should be	Curriculum must meet the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). https://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum	Part time homeschooling an option only for Year 10 to 12

				enrolled in a Distance Education School.		
Australian Capital Territory	5 to 17 years	ACT Education Directorate (the Directorate)	The Education Act 2004 (the Act)	Apply for homeschooling and start before approval. Approval can take 28 days. A statement of intent to be submitted within 3 months of applying for registration. Parents receive a Registration Certificate after approval.	Home Learning Resources Portal developed to support homeschooling parents. Not mandatory to follow a curriculum. https://www.education.act.gov.au/schooling/learning-resource-library	Part time registrations possible with a public or private school

Table 1: Summary of the registration policy in the Australian States and Territories

- ❖ Mandatory requirement to be a resident of the State or Territory and to abide by the respective registration policies.
- ❖ Homeschooling is free and legal in all States and Territories in Australia.
- ❖ This table has been prepared with information from State and Territory Department of Education websites and referenced.

Table 1 summarises the registration policies and procedures for homeschooling in the Australian states and territories to make it easier to comprehend. Each state and territory are bound by the Education Act, and they have different state and territory regulatory bodies for homeschooling. As can be seen from the table, regulations for part time enrolments are inconsistent with states like Victoria, Tasmania and Northern Territory having an option to enrol part time while in New South Wales and Western Australia there is no option for partial homeschooling. Thus, there is no consistency in regulatory policies which makes it difficult for homeschooling families who move inter-state for personal reasons to have consistency in their children's education which is a cause of concern.

Context & Power: Financial assistance for homeschooling students

The mandatory school education in public schools in Australia are funded by the Australian government and is free. Homeschooling parents may have to pay additional amounts to subscribe to paid websites like www.myhomeschool.com to get access to resources and curriculum support. Homeschooling parents in Australia are spending relatively more money compared to their counterparts in the US (Slater et al., 2020). Thus, these parents who are not availing the free public education must spend extra money while homeschooling their children. On the other hand, the Australian Government saves AUD 10,000 on each child who is homeschooling (Slater et al, 2020). So not providing adequate funding or support to these students seem discriminatory, because these parents renounce the opportunity to work and earn to support these children (Slater et al, 2020).

In Queensland, financial assistance is offered to parents of children in years 7-12 as annual Textbook and Resource Allowance (Department of Education Queensland, n.d.). Homeschooling families in Victoria are not provided with any financial support by the Victorian

Registration and Qualifications Authority (Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority [VRQA], n.d.). In NSW, Assistance for Isolated Children (AIC) scheme offers financial assistance to those children who are geographically isolated or having a disability (Service NSW, 2023). Students who are registered to homeschool with a Western Australian Department of Education Regional Office can access the Secondary Assistance Scheme (SAS) to assist with school expenses if they meet the eligibility criteria (Department of Education, Western Australia, n.d.). In Tasmania, homeschooling students are not eligible for Student Assistance Scheme (STAS) (Department of Education Tasmania, 2024). Students who are homeschooling in South Australia might be able to access Centrelink allowance or Isolated Children's Allowance if they meet the eligibility criteria (Department of Education, South Australia, 2024). In the Australian Capital Territory, homeschooling students can apply for the Future of Education Equity Fund if they meet other eligibility criteria (Education Directorate Australian Capital Territory, n.d.). Registered homeschooling students in the Northern Territory are provided with financial assistance through the "Back to School Payment Scheme" to get educational items annually (Department of Education Northern Territory, 2024). Other financial assistance like financial help for Isolated Students and Australian Government student assistance can be availed only if the child lives in an isolated area or has a disability or special health need (Department of Education Northern Territory, 2024). Thus, homeschooling students are at a disadvantage when they try to access funding as the policy around gaining access to funding is also inconsistent across Australian states and territories.

Context and Power: Assessing the achievement standards of homeschooling students

There is no standardised Assessment and Reporting policy for homeschooling across Australian states and territories. In NSW, homeschooling students are eligible to attend the

National Assessment Program–Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test but it is not mandatory (Department of Education New South Wales, 2024). In Victoria, partially enrolled students are assessed in the subject they are partially enrolled in, and they are also eligible to sit the NAPLAN test (Department of Education, Victoria, 2024). In Queensland, parents submit the child’s educational progress report annually for ongoing registration (Department of Education Queensland, 2023). Homeschooling students in South Australia can participate in the NAPLAN test in their enrolled school and the Progressive Achievement Test (PAT) electronically at home (Department of Education, South Australia, 2024). In Western Australia, registered homeschooling students in years 3,5,7 or 9 are eligible to sit online NAPLAN tests (School Curriculum and Standards Authority, 2024). Thus, the Assessment and Reporting for homeschooling students are also inconsistent across states and territories.

Discussion

The discourse analysis data for each state and territory provided deeper insights into Australia’s position for homeschooling. While there are processes and procedures available for home schoolers, discourse analysis revealed potential marginalisation, biases and attitudes towards homeschooling despite the national policy for a right to education. Data showed that some support is available through Regulation and Supervision, Curriculum and Resources, Support Communities and Networks, Tutoring and Educational Support Services, Financial Assistance through funding or grants. Home schoolers seemed to suffer in education without national standards, equitable rights and opportunities. These inconsistencies impact not just the parents and students but also researchers. The reliance on small, selected samples and inconsistency in registration requirements in each state complicate the possibility of a valid and reliable result in the US context (Green-Hennessy, 2023). Methodological challenges faced by

homeschooling researchers in Australia and US are similar due to inconsistencies in the policies across states and territories. Homeschooling is a controversial topic, and people are sceptical about this choice. As Ray (2020) argues, future research could help confront negative rhetoric about homeschooling, and this paper is an initial step to examine the situation about homeschooling in Australia in general. The below sections highlight the challenges and offer suggestions to respond to the needs of families and children to protect their right to education irrespective of the mode of education.

Emerging identity of homeschooling children

Inequity and marginalisation

Our data showed that since parents were allowed to get professional help from qualified teachers, some parents employ them. Many homeschooling families rely on paid websites like <https://euka.edu.au/> , <https://simplyhomeschool.com.au/> etc. to support their children depending on their financial capability. This raises the question of inequity and discrimination as there are a marginalised group of parents who cannot support their children due to the digital divide and language barriers (Purdy,2020, April 16). During Covid, mainstream schools went online or into a hybrid mode and students were learning from home which is different from homeschooling where learning is parent led, and home based. Schools had more control on the materials accessed by students as part of their learning process. Homeschooling students on the other hand are supposed to be the sole responsibility of the parents. Studies have raised concerns regarding the social injustice involved and how parents from low socio-economic areas are at a disadvantage (Liu,2021). More research on homeschooling in the Australian context and consultation with the homeschooling community could help in developing uniform legislation

and regulation across Australia (Jackson & Allan, 2010). More than a decade later there is still no uniform legislation and regulation for homeschooling in Australia which is a source of concern.

Education regulations (policy and practice) & curriculum and support mechanisms

The rationale for introducing the Australian curriculum was to ensure quality, equity and transparency in education. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority aspires to ensure a world class quality education and development of skills required for the 21st century by setting high standards of achievement across the country (ACARA, n.d.). This raises the issue of whether the homeschooling parents can develop these skills in their children through the basic support they receive via the website materials. In New South Wales, homeschooling parents need to plan their child's study based on NSW NESA syllabus (NSW Education Standards Authority ,2021). Likewise, in Western Australia parents need to prepare the Curriculum which meet the requirements of the School's Curriculum and Standards Authority Act 1997 (School Curriculum and Standards Authority,2024). Whereas, in Tasmania, South Australia and the Northern Territory there is no mandatory requirement to follow a particular Curriculum. The Education Directorate ACT has a section to support homeschooling families, 'Home Learning: Resources for students and families' with dedicated sections for resources, support for parents on how to manage their children and a YouTube video on navigating the website. Various resources for parents and children are available on their website www.education.act.gov.au/schooling/home-education/new-registrations (Education Directorate Australian Capital Territory, n.d.). Thus, though parents have the flexibility to design a Curriculum suitable for their children based on the State or National Curriculum and have access to a wide range of resources in the Department of Education websites, parents who are digital immigrants may find it difficult to support their children. Policy makers assume that the

homeschooling parents and students have the adequate digital literacy to navigate the e-resources. Uniform digital orientation on state and territory websites for the homeschooling community could ensure e-safety.

English (as cited in Payne, 2024, September 20) argues that increased regulations on homeschooling may discourage parental engagement with the government. The primary benefit of unschooling is its emphasis on democratic values and the agency for family and young people. In a similar vein, Romanowski (2007) posits that a fundamental principle of a federal democratic system is the recognition of individual choices, including the right of parents to homeschool their children. This right must be upheld as an essence of democratic education. Critics argue that standardising homeschooling policies may lead to increased government control and a greater power imbalance. To address these concerns, the government could strategically support the homeschooling community without imposing tighter restrictions. This approach could provide a more comprehensive understanding of homeschooling motivations, particularly as it serves as a critique of the broader educational system (Neuman and Oz, 2021).

Social and emotional wellbeing

A comprehensive four-decade study on homeschooling reveals children display positive social, emotional and psychological development, contributing to their success in the “real world” (Ray, 2025). Research suggests that homeschooling parents do not have concerns about their children’s socialisation and have consistently demonstrated that they are more socially competent than their peers in mainstream schools (Carlson, 2020; Jackson, 2011; Jackson & Allan, 2010). Hamlin and Cheng (2022), opine that the concerns about social and emotional wellbeing of homeschooled students are largely perceived rather than empirically evidenced. They further highlight that homeschooling parents remain attentive to their children’s social and

emotional wellbeing. Additionally, studies examining adults who were homeschooled as children indicate that homeschooling has not hindered their ability to socialise. However, the analysis of the e-platforms demonstrates that there are limited avenues or centralised systems for social networking and enhancement of collaborative learning opportunities for homeschooling children or families. Payne (2024, September 20) presents a case study where a Western Sydney parent put effort into solving the social contact predicament of homeschooling families by starting the Western Sydney Club with the aim of providing social support for the homeschooling children and parents. We argue that social capabilities are important and similar social clubs, or some systemic support need to be established in respective states and territories to mitigate the possible social isolation of these students. Not all homeschooling students might have highly motivated parents to arrange social networking opportunities. The disparity in opportunities could lead to uneven development of critical social competencies such as teamwork, conflict resolution, and communication skills. Social isolation in children has been linked to poor socio-economic outcomes which in turn affect academic and life success (Hamlin & Cheng, 2022). Partial enrolment into extra-curricular programs in the school could help these homeschooled students to gain real-life socialisation.

Research indicates positive benefit with structured homeschooling environments which foster emotional wellbeing. Parents play a major role in shaping the emotional wellbeing of the homeschooling students. When homeschooling parents do not receive adequate guidance, they may experience stress which can indirectly affect the children by making them emotionally insecure. Researchers suggest that regulatory policies should be developed in consultation with homeschooling parents, who are key stakeholders in this process (Jackson & Allan, 2010; Liberto, 2016). However, it is essential to strike a balance between parents' rights and public

responsibility as proposed by Lubienski (2003). Future studies could investigate the relationship between increased support, standardised policies and their impact on power dynamics.

Conclusion

Through a discourse analysis of e-platforms owned by Education Department of each state and territory in Australia, this paper has compared their stance for supporting homeschooling. Australian educational policy makers could strategically implement uniform registration policies and support mechanisms for the sake of the homeschooling families, teachers and its citizenry. Understanding the perspectives of homeschooling students and parents about the support mechanisms available to them could inform the stakeholders about areas of improving support mechanisms and bringing equity to these students who have genuine reasons for opting to be home-schooled. If the support mechanisms for homeschooling students are enhanced by the government, parents will appreciate, homeschooling children's rights will be protected, and it will ensure these children are on a similar level as the mainstream schooled students. Thus, the transition between homeschooling and mainstream schools could be seamless for the students as well as the teachers in mainstream schools. Parents and government could ensure quality of education while sharing the responsibility of raising future citizens, instead of placing long term encumbrance on these homeschooling parents.

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Generative AI statement

The authors declare that no Generative AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.