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Home-schooling and parent-child relationships during lockdown in England: a Foucauldian discourse analysis

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the impact of home-schooling during the Covid-19 lockdown on parent-child relationships. Online semi-structured interviews were conducted with an opportunistic sample of parents ($n = 11$) in England who were experiencing home-schooling during the first period of lockdown. A Foucauldian Discourse Analysis was conducted on the data and six subject positions were revealed. Home-schooling was variously constructed as a bonding experience, an opportunity for new appreciation of children, the cause of new conflicts in the home setting, the cause of psychological stress, the creation of a new parent-teacher role and the creation of a new child-pupil role. These discursive constructions confirmed the findings of previous research into lockdown home-schooling related to the conflicts of time and space, the impact of differing levels of parental self-efficacy, and direction of children's development. This research provided further detailed descriptions of the lived experiences of participants in these areas but also supported recent research on parental attachment that suggests that the construction of parent-child relationships can be quickly re-negotiated under the influence of external factors.

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Introduction

The global impact of the Covid-19 pandemic that began in early 2020 had a wide-ranging influence on family life. One aspect of this was the closure of schools, with UNESCO (2020) reporting that at least 1.5 billion children and young people were affected by school closures across 195 countries. In the UK, on March 23rd the government used the emergency Coronavirus Act 2020 to direct education providers to close their doors to all but the children of key workers and children classed as vulnerable. This command-and-control approach (Timmins, 2021) resulted in 87% of parents home-schooling their children in spring and early summer 2020 (Office for Students, 2020). Parents were suddenly confronted with multiple parenting tasks, including dealing with the demands of educating their children at home, online or remotely from school (Prime et al., 2020).

In the United Kingdom compliance levels were high, with two thirds of parents completing the activities set by schools (Greenway & Eaton-Thomas, 2020). Family timetables were temporarily rearranged to incorporate new work and learning schedules and routines (Dempsey, 2021) and family members spent more time together. But parent-child relationships were transformed as children experienced physical separation from their peers, friends, teachers and extended family and immediate family suddenly became their only point of reference (Luijten et al., 2021). The aim of this research was to explore the impact of home-schooling in England during the Covid-19 pandemic on parent-child relationships through the discourses constructed by parents shortly after the event.

A review of literature on the experiences of children, parents and families of home-schooling during the Covid-19 lockdowns revealed four main themes. These were the competing demands that home-

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schooling placed on parents, the links between home-schooling during the Covid-19 pandemic and parental stress, and the impact of Covid-19 home-schooling on parental and child self-efficacy. These themes are discussed in the following sections.

Home-schooling and competing demands

A significant volume of research into parental involvement in children's education has made strong links between parent-child relationships and educational outcomes (Harris & Chrispeels, 2006; Kington et al., 2020; Reininger & López, 2017; Roberts & Simpson, 2016), including the importance of parental involvement and interaction with their child when learning in the home (Gurdal et al., 2016; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Wentzel et al., 2016). Under normal circumstances, parents report that the greater the contact between parents and children, the more favourable are the perceptions of the parent-child relationship (Verweij et al., 2021). During the Covid-19 lockdown this was the case for some families (Perelli-Harris & Walzenbach, 2020), particularly for those parents more able to use cognitive, complex aspects of empathy (Gambin et al., 2020).

For others, home-schooling caused moderate levels of parental stress (Zinn & Bayer, 2021) and led to an increase in conflict between parents (Basso et al., 2023). Friction was caused by parents experiencing new demands on themselves and their relationship with their family. Examples of this include caring for children whilst simultaneously working from home, experiencing economic hardship due to unemployment and anxiety about the health of family and friends (Johnson et al., 2021). Lack of space at home elevated parental stress (Aznar et al., 2021); their ability to support their children (Shum et al., 2023); and had an impact on parents' approaches to discipline. Kallitsoglou and Topalli (2021) found that the infrastructure at home compounded any existing relational characteristics. For example, any lack of access to technological devices and poor network quality often led to conflict between family members.

The competing demands of home schooling were especially acute for families where both parents were working (Bates et al., 2023; Salin et al., 2020). Mothers were more likely to reduce their work hours and increase childcare responsibilities during lockdown and experienced more psychological distress (Xue & McMunn, 2021). Also, for mothers, the loss of childcare facilities during lockdown was associated with a higher risk of unemployment or adverse employment outcomes, something not found to impact on fathers (Petts et al., 2021).

Parental stress theory

Parental stress theory (Abidin, 1986, 1992) provides a framework for understanding the links between home-schooling under pandemic conditions, parental stress, and parent-child relationships as well as child development and learning. Parental stress theory considers how both the demands of parenting in itself and factors surrounding parenting can lead to stress for parents, which can in turn affect parenting behaviours and, notably in the context of this research, relationships with children. In general, stressors can be classified as external (e.g. financial pressure, work demands), internal (e.g. social norms and idealised standards around parenting), child characteristics (e.g. disabilities, health issues or behavioural challenges), and social support (or lack thereof; e.g. lack of childcare assistance or emotional support for the parent). The effects of heightened parental stress associated with any of these factors can be thought of in terms of parenting practices (e.g. irritability, fatigue and decreased patience resulting in harsher discipline or inconsistent parenting practice), parent-child relationships (e.g. increased conflict or emotional distance), and child development (e.g. children of high-stress parents might struggle to regulate stress themselves, and may experience more behavioural, social and emotional challenges). Research in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that parental stress increased during home-schooling (Bates et al., 2023; May et al., 2023) and stressors were heightened for many parents (e.g. concerning work-life balance and work expectations, unemployment or financial uncertainty), but being at home together may have afforded more opportunities for social support within families, making for a complex landscape with regard to stress, parenting, and the consequences for parent-child relationships and child development and learning (Brown et al., 2020).

Parental self-efficacy and lockdown home schooling

Self-efficacy of parents was found to be a significant factor associated with the experiences in parent-child relationships during lockdowns (Gambin et al., 2020). Self-efficacy operates as a mediator between external and environmental variables and internal psychological conditions (Eisenèberg et al., 2005; Jones & Prinz, 2005). Higher levels of parental self-efficacy contribute to more successful adjustments and coping strategies in the context of challenges (Wittkowski et al., 2017), whilst low levels of parental self-efficacy can be caused by distress, social isolation and parental depression (Bandura, 1997). Findings around parental self-efficacy, stress and home-schooling also resonate with parental stress theory (e.g. Abidin, 1992). For example, Kallitsoglou and Topalli (2021) found that mothers described feeling of stress about concurrent demands, guilt over not meeting their child(ren)'s needs and worry over their child(-ren)'s academic progress. Parents in the study by Misfud (2021) also reported feeling of guilt and stress at not being able to give their full input to both work and home-schooling. Pozas et al. (2021) sampled Mexican and German parents' experiences of home-schooling and found that the pedagogical tasks that they had to take over during home-schooling were severely challenging. Mothers in the study by Kallitsoglou and Topalli (2021) also reported low confidence in being able to support home-schooling activities. Similarly, De Jong et al.'s (2022) study of parents in the Netherlands reports the central role that parents' sense of efficacy in teaching had on the degree of conflict during completion of home-schooling activities. They also consider if home-schooling may have created a vicious cycle of stress and household chaos that led to parents' low self-efficacy and increased family conflict. A study by Girard and Prado (2022) revealed some of these interconnections. They conducted a longitudinal study of French parents' pre- and post-lockdown beliefs and attitudes towards their children's academic learning. It was found that those parents who viewed academic activity at home positively before lockdown had increased academic expectations during home-schooling.

Children's self-efficacy during lockdown home schooling

Bubb and Jones (2020) explored Norwegian parents, teachers, pupils and school leaders' experiences of home-schooling using a questionnaire survey. Parents reported that children had become more independent in their learning, had a greater sense of ownership of their learning, and took responsibility for organising their learning. Two thirds of the parents also reported gaining more insight into their child(-ren)'s learning. Mifsud (2021) sampled parents in Malta who also reported that their children had improved organisational skills and were also more likely to appreciate their child(ren) because they were no longer stuck in the daily routine. Fontenelle-Tershchuk (2021) used a survey and focus group with Canadian parents. These parents strongly argued that home-schooling with young children (aged 5–11 years) was not suitable as children this age could not work independently. The available technology was useful but not a replacement for a school-teacher and the main focus of home-schooling became the technology itself rather than children's learning. Importantly, these parents recognised that access to learning activities through technology cannot alone 'teach' children and that expert direct pedagogical input is needed. Overall, Kallitsoglou and Topalli (2021) found that the reports of the most positive home-schooling experiences were from those who paid attention to the present and used the extra time they were able to spend with their child(ren) as an opportunity for bonding and promoting family and child well-being.

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), where motivation and engagement within a family relate to three core psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness), also broadly resonates with the above findings concerning parental and child self-efficacy and home-schooling, The unique conditions of lockdown had the potential to change family dynamics and closeness, as well as to change parents' and children's roles in, and perceptions of autonomy and competence with regard to, education. This article contributes original insight into home-schooling and parent-child relationships under COVID-19 lockdown conditions, as well as to understandings of how parenting, parent-child relationships and parental roles in children's education can change and adapt under emergency or crisis conditions more generally.

Materials and methods

Conceptualising the parent-child relationship during home-schooling

This research used the work of Foucault to conceptualise and analyse discourses associated with parent-child relationships during lockdown. From this position, human interactions are viewed as complex social processes subject to the influence of knowledge and power (Foucault, 1977). This manifests through, for example, the organisation of space, time or people's activity (Hamed et al., 2017). Moreover, through this lens, the reality of society-wide events can ultimately only be known through the individual and can only be processed by individuals in partnerships and groups (Zinn & Bayer, 2021). This makes Foucauldian Discourse Analysis an effective tool for investigating changes in parent-child relations during lockdown home-schooling. Schools are conceptualised in terms of power relations in which children must submit to authority in order to gain the knowledge that resides in teachers (Foucault, 1980). Schools impose an ideal model of the child as a 'good learner' who is deferential and studious (Worthman & Troiano, 2019). This perception is then formed during the completion of education activities through a regime of practice (Foucault, 1995).

It is argued that during home-schooling these power relations migrated to home settings and were played out by parents and children rather than teachers and children. Research suggests that the operation of power within and on family relationships is a factor in the potential for experiencing happiness, contentment, pain or anxiety (Cheetham et al., 2017). Therefore, the operation of power relations in a home-schooling context can also reveal how home-schooling was experienced affectively and psychologically by the members of a family. Discourse refers to the rules, divisions or systems used by a particular body of knowledge (Arribas-Ayllon & Walkerdine, 2008) and subject positions locate individuals or groups at specific points in the networks of power and social relations (Foucault, 1990). Evidence for subject positions emerges from the analysis of statements and patterns of language used in discourses. Therefore, subject positions taken by parents when describing parent-child relationships during lockdown home-schooling are identified from the statements and patterns of language used by parents. These patterns are latent in written or spoken communication but can be revealed through Foucauldian Discourse Analysis which is able to identify patterns of language across a range of data derived from individual family contexts. This is the methodological approach taken in this research.

As a conceptual framework, social constructionism views meaning as an emergent property of social interactions (Burr, 2015). Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) uses a social constructionist methodology which is concerned with the interplay of power structures and individual discourse (Willig, 2013) and is a particularly useful research tool in identifying behaviour changes both over time and at a specific point in history (Parker, 2014). In FDA, language has a specific status. Any statement is a function of language derived from a relevant discourse field (Foucault, 1972). In the context of this research, the focus for analysis is therefore the products of language used by those who have experienced lockdown home-schooling. FDA has recently been used in a wide range of people-orientated studies including education (see Spicksley et al., 2021; Worthman & Troiano, 2019); psychiatry and psychotherapy, (see Cheetham et al., 2017); nursing (see Clinton & Springer, 2017; Gumley et al., 2021; Van der Wath, 2019); and engagement with technology (see Outila & Kiuru, 2021).

Methods

This research builds on a questionnaire survey administered to parents with at least one primary-school aged child, which was distributed nationally in England via social media ($n = 3637$). Participants in the survey were invited to a second phase of semi-structured interviews ($n = 11$), findings from which are presented in this paper. Although this research aimed to explore all aspects of parent-child relationships, the self-selected recruitment process led to a sample that contained only female participants. This limitation means that only the female-parent perspective is explored in this paper but in the context of a research design encompassing all gender orientations.

Two of the participants were part of single-female parent families and the other nine were part of two-parent families consisting of one male and one female. In total, six of the families had one child, three of the families had two children and two of the families had three children. All participants had

one child of Primary school age apart from one participant who had two children of Primary school age. The other children in the families were either of pre-school or Secondary school age but participants were encouraged to focus their responses on the Primary school age children in their family, which formed the focus for this research.

An interview schedule was generated using key themes from the open-ended text responses in the survey questions. The interviews were conducted remotely online using Microsoft Teams and were recorded using a portable digital recorder. Following each interview, the audio recordings were manually transcribed, and the subsequent document sent to each participant for member checking. The transcription process facilitated familiarity with the entire data set and formed the first part of the data analysis process.

Data analysis

Transcriptions from the interviews were analysed sequentially, in terms of the date of the interview, using Willig's (2013) six steps of FDA. The strength of this analysis tool is that it facilitates analytic thinking in a manageable way (Gumley et al., 2021), and allowed the researchers to move from an holistic impression of the data set to the identification of subject profiles from across different transcripts. Firstly, transcripts were read in their entirety in order to provide a first impression of the discourse orientation. Secondly, discursive constructions were identified by using a highlight function to select sections of the text which referred directly to the objects of analysis. Each section of discourse was then thematically named. Third, the action orientation of each discourse was identified by considering what the participant hoped to gain from adopting this particular point of view. Fourth, where there were action orientations common across different transcripts these were grouped into positionings. Once positionings were identified, individual transcripts were then re-read in order to identify whether further examples of each positioning had been missed on earlier readings. Fifth, the practice possibilities of each positioning were analysed. Finally, the positionings and the practices were combined and summarised to produce composite subject positions.

The following quotation from Participant 2 can be used as an example of how the discursive constructions were grouped into subject positions for this research.

> It was really nice for me as someone who is interested to see how he was getting on. Because normally you very much leave that stuff over to the teacher and hope that they are doing what they should be. They are at school five days a week so it's not like you get to share it with their teacher or anything, so it was really nice.

A reading of the whole transcript had already suggested that this participant viewed lockdown home-schooling as a positive experience. This excerpt was selected because it described in a distinct way the object of analysis, which was home-schooling, and made reference to the parent-child relationship. From this participant's perspective, home-schooling provided new knowledge about their child's progress at school ('how he was getting on') and an opportunity to engage with the educational domain of the child (the 'stuff' you normally leave to the teacher). This orientation was evident in other transcripts. For example, Participant 5 described lockdown home-schooling activities as giving a better understanding of their child's learning and a welcome increase in communication with the school. As other transcripts were read, other aspects of appreciation were revealed and these were eventually grouped under a subject position. The strong contrast between this perspective and some of the others from the transcripts confirmed this as a distinct subject position.

Research ethics

The project followed the guiding principles laid out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2024) and was gained approved from the Arts, Humanities and Education Research Ethics Panel at the University of Worcester (Ref: CAHE19200029). In summary, voluntary informed consent was sought from each participant, who had the opportunity to withdraw at any time during the data collection

stage of the project. In order to obtain fully informed consent, and in line with standard ethical principles and requirements of research governance, the team ensured that participants were:

- fully informed of the purposes and methodology of the research by providing an information sheet outlining relevant details;
- under no pressure to participate in the research. They were fully informed of the process of the project, their right to withdraw from the study without explanation, and the mechanism by which to do this;
- aware that all data obtained would be coded anonymously, be strictly confidential and non-accessible to others;
- informed that any data collected may be used in future presentations and publications, but that their identity would be protected.

Signed consent forms were required from any person involved in the individual online interviews and all data were stored and destroyed in line with the University Research Data Management Policy (2018).

Results

In the following section, the six subject positions revealed by the data are presented.

Home-schooling as a bonding experience

Participants who adopted this subject position constructed discourses on home schooling that focussed on a new level of bonding they experienced with their children as a result of completing home schooling activities. For example, for Participant 1 the relationship with her child, from the position of being a parent, was a key discourse throughout the interview. Home-schooling was presented as an opportunity to strengthen bonds with her child and, as such, was a positive opportunity:

> I would say the most important part of the home school experience for me was that I got to spend so much time with him on a bonding level. It's brought us closer together and it's, if this makes any sense, it's been a bonding experience.

The home-schooling experience is described as an affirmation of certain aspects of her child's development:

> It has given me a huge sense of pride during this whole kind of experience.

On a similar theme, Participant 9 constructed home-schooling as a discourse around revelation and the opportunities that home schooling activities offered to explore new areas of understanding the parent-child bond:

> We've both been working in slightly different ways so there's more time for our child and I think we probably know them even better than we did in terms of our child's likes and dislikes and how to sort of try and encourage them.

In the presence of different working patterns brought about by lockdown and home schooling, this Participant experienced a new motivation to engage with their child and framed this as a positive opportunity. The experience of bonding was also evident in a sibling-to-sibling relationship. Participant 8 states:

> We've had more time together. We've had more time outside as a family. We're a blended family so we're just not long all moved in together so the two boys in terms of being stepbrothers have had a lot more time together to bond.

In all of these discourses, home-schooling activities provided a new dimension to family relationships and new opportunities to get to know other family members in new ways. Overall, participants who adopted this subject position constructed home schooling activity as a positive component of their parent-child relationship. This perception emerged as discourses around home schooling activities

facilitating a new appreciation and understanding of how and at what stage their children were developing socially, academically and emotionally. As a result of this construction most of these participants demonstrated an intrinsic motivation to ensure home-schooling was a positive experience.

Home-schooling as an appreciative opportunity

Participants who adopted this subject position constructed discourses around the role of home-schooling activities in revealing how their child engaged with the learning process and the success that was observed. They are positioned as parents actively interested in their children's development and frame the directive to home school as an opportunity to learn more about their child. For example, Participant 2 viewed home schooling as a focus for curiosity:

> I guess pinpointing those strengths is interesting. I guess it was just interesting for me to be part of it as someone who is interested.

Home-schooling is constructed as an opportunity to gain tacit knowledge about school learning:

> It was nice to actually see learning in action and the areas where he was really good and really encourage him in that.

This motivational aspect was explained in terms of novelty and making time to engage with the children:

> It was also really nice to do lots of fun and interesting things with the children and use lots of online resources and things that I wouldn't have bothered going to find otherwise. It was probably mostly beneficial for me to be able to share in it with them where I wouldn't normally have the chance to do that.

This appreciation of the benefits for home-schooling was shared by Participant 3:

> It has had a negative impact as well, I'm not saying that it hasn't, but a positive aspect is she's been able to take a lot of control over her self-directed learning really. So, school have been fabulous and she's had at least three pieces of work a day sent to her on Google Classroom and from that I have sort of negotiated with her from quite early on that she would take control and do her three pieces of homework each day. So, she wouldn't have got that kind of autonomy and decision making if it was in the school structure.

Participant 5 also valued the tacit knowledge about school processes:

> From a parent's perspective it has given me a greater understanding of what he is learning and where he's at.

Participant 8 constructs home-schooling as an opportunity to reflect on the dispositions their child has developed in school, but which are now demonstrated in a home context:

> I think I've been impressed by his work ethic. He's actually quite independent and just gets on with it. I've been quite pleased with that really. He just wants to get on with it. It seems to me that he is quite intrinsically motivated which I'm quite pleased about. He's not doing it for the praise or the accolade. He just wants to do it. So that's quite pleasing.

A further perspective was reported by Participant 5, who constructed home-schooling as an opportunity to confirm their child's level of learning:

> It has brought the curriculum more alive, to kind of question him on whether he's already covered this in school, or have you not covered that yet?

The benefits of this shift in learning domain from school to home was further emphasised by a participant with a child with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Participant 7 articulated a discourse about the individualisation and the support of their child's individual needs that was possible during home-schooling:

> He benefits from having one to one learning. So being sat at home, especially when I was furloughed, the one to one, so being able to go through things with him and make him sit down and concentrate has been absolutely brilliant. One to one has been wonderful for him rather than sat one to thirty or whatever it is in the classroom. And the amount of noise, because it's one to one we've had no telly, no noise on, no distractions. So, again, rather than being in a classroom with many children talking at the same time and stuff

> and different activities going on he's been able to focus on the one activity and sort of go for it. So yeah it's been great.

In this discourse the removal of the child from the conditions of mainstream schooling has better met the child's individual developmental needs. In this context, the directive to home school led to a reduction in social interactions and sensory load which the parent frames as being of benefit to the child. Participant 10 positioned home-schooling as an opportunity to consider their child's longer-term Special Educational Needs:

> He's not very good with new people but you need to learn how to deal with new people as well, if that makes sense, rather than always relying on me. So, I suppose that is something that has come out of home schooling, that perhaps I should leave him be a bit more and not rush in all of the time.

Later, they go on to say:

> I think I've realized that he needs more in his life than just me, and for a long time it has just been me and I've been the answer. So, if anything it's been making me think about where he's going to be as a teenager, as a young adult, because he doesn't want me to do everything so I have to let others do something or take something.

Overall, in this construction home schooling operated as a catalyst for reflection about the long-term direction of a child's development. The directive to home-school a child is framed by the benefits it afforded for high levels of environment control over a child but also on the implications of this reliance on social skills and the levels of independence that may be needed in the future. In this sense, the parent-child bonding during home-schooling is both strengthened but also placed in the wider context of child development and life journeys.

Home-schooling as the cause of spatio-temporal conflict

Participants who adopted this subject position constructed discourses around home-schooling as causing temporal conflicts, spatial conflicts and conflicts around access to technology. These were derived from interaction between people or between people and objects and had a negative impact on the parent-child relationship. For example, in discussing home-schooling, Participant 2 states:

> There were lots of challenges around how I was going to get my work hours in … I had a timetable and every minute of every day was accounted for because we couldn't waste any time … .I had to still get fifteen hours of work done in a week. My husband was working, so it was a lot and it was a real challenge.

Home-schooling activities increased obligations towards meeting their children's needs and there is a strong sense of injustice about a parent being placed in this position. This participant went on to ask, '*Is it fair on her to sit her in front of a screen for a couple of hours every day whilst you do that stuff?* The age of the child had a relation to discourse around temporal conflict. For example, Participant 7 describes the demands that younger children's short attention spans put on working parents during home-schooling:

> When kids want an answer they want it now. They can't wait for sort of 45 minutes because Mummy's on a conference call or something.

This subject position reveals the conflicts caused to the parent-child relationship by parental work commitments. All of the Participants were female and so these conflicts may be linked to wider economic and social pressures to prioritize work over family experienced by working mothers.

Participants also constructed discourses around the impact of spatial conflicts on parent-child relationships. For example, when discussing work, Participant 8 reports:

> Obviously if I was actually online and talking then that was quite hard so one of us would have to go and sit in the lounge.

Although space was less of a challenge for Participant 6, they describe some of the changes to the home space that needed to made to accommodate home-schooling activities:

> There has not been a particular challenge because I normally work from home. So, all we've done is set her up next door to me in the office. It's not a brilliant table but she's got her own little table and if she needs anything answering then we work through it together.

This participant goes on to acknowledge that this might be problem for other families:

> But I think it helps because we have that specified area that we go to. I think if we didn't have that and if it was just in the lounge with the TV on it would be perhaps not quite the same.

This suggests an economic dimension to the experience of spatial conflict. Those families with larger houses could more easily make adaptations that led to an improved parent-child relationship. This dimension is also evident in discourse around access to digital space. Participant 1 reports:

> There's been apps and things that they've wanted us to download. But the only problem with that is that I've got one laptop and he's got a phone but I obviously don't let him go on it all of the time, and I've got a phone which I don't want him on. But my laptop I've been using for my dissertation and my assignments for uni so he hasn't been able to use it. So it's been a real challenge from the fact that they were solely reliant on electronic devices for us to use as a backup. So I've found it really difficult. Plus they wanted us to print things out. I don't have a printer at home, so it's all been very much … I feel like it's been an uphill battle of trying to sort things.

In this example the directive to home school caused conflict both in terms of physical hardware but also access to the digital domain. This 'battle' is framed within an affective discourse around the problems that this caused. This discourse is set within the wider context of society and discourse around poverty:

> It's really just reinforced that we don't have everything at home that we would need in that situation and there was no way that I could afford to provide my child with their own laptop or printer.

Overall, in this construction home-schooling is described as the cause of conflict and had a negative impact on parent-child relationships. This was framed in discourses around the amount of time parents had to facilitate home-schooling activities, the amount of space available for children to complete them and availability of technology to access and complete the activities. These discourses relate to wider discourses around the pressures on working mothers, the availability of adequate housing and access to technology. Home-schooling is not the cause of these social issues, but these participants present the completion of home-schooling activities as foregrounding them in a domestic context and in a way that had a negative impact on parent-child relationships.

Home-schooling as the cause of psychological conflict

Participants who adopted this subject position constructed discourses around home-schooling as causing conflict with employment contractual obligations. Although caused by socially created and perceived expectations, these were manifested internally as affective, psychological, cognitive and motivational conflicts that had a negative impact on the parent-child relationship. In common with subject position 3, the theme of conflicts of time is present in the discourse but is focused on the impact of completing home-schooling activities rather than the practicalities. For example, Participant 4 talked at length about the internal conflict they experienced:

> I have a job and a role that demands full time hours and commitment and during Covid that feels that that's doubled … My husband is in the same situation so actually we are possibly barely parenting, never mind educating, if I'm honest. So they are safe, they are safe but they are not getting the interaction that they should be getting in home because of the demands of our jobs … Work consumes both me and my husband.

For this participant home-schooling obligations have changed the character of the family home:

> It's influenced the pattern of the day excessively … Monday to Friday there is no balance. I live at work. I don't work from home. That's how it feels.

This discourse focusses on the perceived injustice of home-schooling which is described as unreasonable and overwhelming. From this subject position, home-schooling is framed as a disruptor. and this leads to changes in how the home is viewed by the parent. Participant 4 continues:

> I think we accepted we weren't going to achieve it and came to terms with it, as upsetting as it was. They've missed a bulk of education and that's very sad.

This discourse focuses on the internal conflict created by home-schooling. The child has a right to receive an education, but home-schooling has disrupted this, and the parent is experiencing internal distress and guilt. Discourse also centred around the internal conflict created by children's behaviour during home-schooling activities. For example, Participant 5 described the studiousness of their child:

> I think there have been times where I've been willing to push a little bit more in terms of him saying, 'Oh, I don't really want to do that.' And I'm saying, 'You know if you were in school you would be doing it so let's do it now'.

In this discourse, the parent foregrounds changes in the child's behaviour in different learning contexts. The parent describes exasperation at the perceived difference between the child's motivation to engage in schoolwork in a school setting compared to a home setting. Overall, this subject position describes the increased expectations parents experienced during home-schooling and the negative impact that it had on themselves. Implicit in this discourse is that the child is the cause of the internal conflict in the parent but is not blamed directly because the lack of access to school is the ultimate cause. This subject position represents the rejection of the parent of the role of home-school 'teacher'.

Differential discursive constructions of the home-schooling 'teacher' role

Participants who adopted this subject position constructed discourses around the new role of home-schooling 'teacher' that they felt they were required to adopt. They describe levels of self-efficacy and feelings of guilt and inadequacy, with a particular reference to subject knowledge and pedagogy. Different positions led to different impacts on the parent-child relationship. For example, Participant 6 reported:

> I think it's highlighted to both of us that parents don't know everything. And that is a nasty, horrible thing to say but there are certain things that she learns and needs to learn but my knowledge … you know, I'm human. We all have gaps in our knowledge and that has been very much highlighted.

Participant 8 and Participant 11 also felt as if they were lacking in some areas of subject knowledge:

> Negative wise I suppose maybe from the maths perspective he can see how terrible I am. It was a bit embarrassing. (Participant 8)

> I have found it quite tricky in some respects because, for instance, maths (and I'm sure you've heard this before) maths is taught in a completely different way to when I was taught it school. So, trying to think about it in her terms is quite tricky, and explain things in her terms. (Participant 11)

These participants were self-critical and felt disempowered by the teaching role they believed they needed to adopt. This was not limited to discourse around the subject of mathematics:

> So I've had to rely on Google quite a lot, so it's made me feel a bit stupid really, and that my son is more intelligent on those parts than I am. (Participant 1)

> I think he's had some nice pastoral and fun stuff but I'm not sure he's had any direct input teaching … That would be my downside: the lack of formal input into his teaching. (Participant 10)

Participant 1 explains a link between knowledge, power and identity in home schooling:

> So there's been a real power shift between me and him, quite a lot during the whole of the home schooling experience.

And,

> I don't really want to go through it ever again, if I'm honest.

However, not all participants described negative experiences. For example, Participant 9 positioned their perceived lack of knowledge about the school approach to reading in an opportunistic way:

> So, I feel I now have a much better understanding of things like phonics and how our child puts that together. So, when we are reading together or when we are spotting things out and about I think I know better now how to engage our child and explain to them. So, I know what digraph is or a trigraph. All these

> things that they sort of go through with you at the beginning of the year but they didn't embed themselves in the same way that they did in having our child at home.

Overall, this subject position explored the relationship between pedagogical skills, subject knowledge and the expectations parents had of themselves as home-schooling 'teachers'. This subject position is important in demonstrating how similar circumstances can be perceived in different ways. The home-schooling 'teacher' role is constructed as both a burden and an opportunity, and parents constructed their perceived role as an authority figure and a learner alongside their children. Differences in discursive constructions of the home-schooling 'teacher' led to differences in the impact on parent-child relationships.

Confusion and resistance in home-schooling 'pupils'

Participants who adopted this subject position constructed discourses around their children as home-schooling 'pupils'. They describe the confusion that their children experienced. For example, Participant 1 describes their child's resistance to adopting the 'pupil' role at home:

> I feel that as a parent you are expected to do the role model, the parent role, the disciplinarian and now with all of this the teacher as well, there's no barriers to it, there's no kind of like lines that can be drawn to say, look this is my role now–you kind of flip in between them. And I think that's been really confusing for him and it's been really confusing for me. Because he doesn't want to listen to me when I'm in teacher role and the best thing I've learned from this is when to let go and not to force the issue.

Participant 5 also reports their child's reaction to being framed as a 'pupil' at home:

> I was asking my son about it the other day and he said, 'Yeah. You're my parent, not my teacher.'

And Participant 8 constructs a cause for children's resistance to the 'pupil' role at home:

> We tried to invent things to keep to our schedule in terms of the amount of time we allocated for lesson time. And I think because it's coming from us not their teacher they don't necessarily think that's work that they have to do.

In these discourses, home-schooling has caused parental identity fluidity that is manifest in parent-child transactions and communication. Participants also described the affective dimension of children being 'pupil' at home and the impact on the parent-child relationship. For example, Participant 9 describes a position in which their child's emotional reaction to requests to complete home-schooling work placed the child in a position of power:

> I think I was quite worried because it was really starting to negatively impact, because any time it looked like you were going to try and make our child do anything school related, or you suggested any activity to them they would just go into melt down. There was a lot of anger.

And Participant 11 describes in detail the context for emotional interactions with their child:

> Tempers have been frayed because my youngest, because we are talking about Primary … 'Home is for home. Home is for fun. Home isn't' for school.' That's pretty much verbatim what she said to me. So she doesn't want to get engaged in school work because being at home with Mum isn't about school work. And that's really difficult because even now I'm saying 'This room now is … you need to pretend that I'm at work. I'm not even in this room. When I'm on meetings you can't come in.' But it's like talking to a brick wall because they just come in anyway. So it's difficult then … she gets very frustrated, really frustrated. Because now she can't see me as just Mum. She sees me as Teacher and Mum, and that makes her a little bit frustrated and confused. We have had a significant increase in tantrums and stropping where as normally for her homework before she would sit down and look through it and she'd be like 'Mum I've been doing this'. It was just completely different. The pressure is very different with kids because they are your own flesh and blood, you want them to do well.

Overall, the behaviour of the children described by these participants demonstrates their confusion and refusal to adopt the role of home-school 'pupil'. This construction focuses more on the child(ren)'s reactions to home-schooling than on the parents' attempts to act as home-school 'teachers' and foregrounds the visceral impact on the parent-child relationship.

Discussion

This research explored the impact of Covid-19 lockdown home-schooling on parent-child relationships with a focus on the discursive constructions of parents in relation to their children. The existing literature suggests that, whilst the directive to home-school children was uncomplicated, the responses to this by parents were varied and complex. Unlike previous studies, which explored specific aspects of parents' experiences, the holistic approach of this study revealed the multiple and contrasting perspectives of parents in parallel. It also considered the impact of these perspectives on the parent-child relationship for the first time.

The role of time and space during home-schooling

In common with the findings from other studies, this study found that for some parents the increased time spent with their children was a positive experience. For example, participants grouped under the subject position 1 constructed home-schooling as a bonding experience and a positive opportunity to work with their children in an educational role. Participants grouped under subject position 2 appreciated the opportunity that home-schooling provided to see their children engaged in activities that at other times were confined to the school domain. This supports the research of Somogyi et al. (2023) and Verweij et al. (2021) who also found that the greater the time parents spent with their children the more favourable their perceptions of the parent-child relationship; seen through the lens of parental stress theory, the affordance of more time together positively impacted closeness. This study provides detail about the construction of the perceptions of parents in this sample. For example, many described the pride they felt for the children, including pride at seeing their child's strengths as a learner, being able to witness learning in action, their child's educational outcomes, independence and work ethic. Participants also described the role of home-schooling in bringing the curriculum alive and the bonding that this led to both in established families and recently formed blended families, resonating with notions of the importance of relatedness in self-determination theory.

Participants in this study also described some of the challenging aspects of home-schooling. For example, participants grouped under subject position 3 constructed home-schooling as the cause of temporal and spatial conflict as new and conflicting demands were made on their time and living space. Participants grouped under subject position 4 described the impact of home-schooling on their mental and emotional states. These findings are similar to those of Wiemer and Clarkson (2023) who report home-schooling was the most common cause of stress for parents during Covid; Zinn and Bayer (2021) and Johnson et al. (2021) who found that increased time with their children was a cause of stress and conflict; Salin et al. (2020) who found that stress experienced by parents was greater if the parents were working; and a Khalid and Singal (2023) who describe the blurring of boundaries between home and school. Again, this study provides details about the construction of these perceptions by parents in this sample. Work was described as all-consuming, and the education of their children was considered an additional burden. This led to redefining of boundaries, where home felt like space dedicated to work. It also led to feelings of guilt about the missed educational opportunities for their children.

Foucauldian Discourse Analysis is concerned with the ways in which power relations can be used to describe conditions in the present time by analysing the conditions in which particular 'truths' emerge in discourse (Khan & MacEachen, 2021). This study provides a unique perspective on experience of home-schooling during the Covid-19 pandemic and the new role of 'parent-teacher' that this created. In terms of power, some participants did not resist and were able to expand the construction of their relationships with their child to include the 'parent-teacher' role (for example, Participants 2, 3 and 8). Where parents resisted, there was anger and frustration directed at policy makers, employers and, in some cases, participants' children. Here, the 'parent-teacher' role was rejected by the parent, the child or both (for example, Participants 1, 4 and 5). Interestingly, parents who were teachers by profession did not always accept the role of 'parent-teacher' due to the pressure of their work and a reduction in the time and energy they could spend with their child (for example, Participant 4). These findings suggest that some parents and children readily internalised educational norms in the family domain but others rejected this even when they were complicit in the educational domain of school, either as teachers or

pupils. Overall, their appears to have been a diversity of response, perhaps because expectations to comply were not enforced by the English government at that time.

The role of self-efficacy for parents

In common with other research findings, parental perceptions of self-efficacy when supporting their children's learning in this sample were important influences on the parent-child relationship. Participants grouped under subject position 5 described a lack of both pedagogical content knowledge and subject content knowledge when supporting their children. This impacted on their self-perception causing feelings of embarrassment and stupidity. This supports findings by Kallitsoglou and Topalli (2021), Misfud (2021), Pozas et al. (2021) and Shum et al. (2023). From a Foucauldian perspective, the activity of home schooling introduced a new intellectual dynamic to family relations, in which children often found themselves the expert knowers. Interestingly, one participant in this research described a subsequent power shift caused by this situation. In some cases, children had both more pedagogical content knowledge and subject content knowledge than their parents, particularly in the subject of mathematics. However, other parents constructed this scenario as a positive opportunity to learn about pedagogical techniques, for example by watching the school-teacher on a live video stream. Self-efficacy has been found to influence parents' ability to react to change (Wittkowski et al., 2017) and this may explain the contrasting discursive constructions by participants in this sample.

The role of 'teacher' in parent child relationships

Some of the previous research into children during lockdown home-schooling suggests a positive experience. Bubb and Jones (2020) and Mifsud (2021) both report a general increase in children's independence, self-organisation and this was also described by participants in this study grouped under subject positions 1 and 2. Spear et al. (2023) identify a new concept of parental participation in children's schools as a result of Covid home-schooling. However, a key aspect of parent-child relationship in this study that does not seem to have been reported elsewhere is the parent's perception that their children viewed parental roles differently during home-schooling activities. Participants grouped under subject position 6 describe their children's confusion and frustration at the new 'teacher' role that their parent was playing. Some children were very direct and refused to see the parent as a teacher. For others, participants described a threshold level beyond which children became angry and frustrated at parents for staying in the 'teacher' role. If the 'teacher' role was maintained by the parent for too long children became unmotivated to work and this affected the wider parent-child relationship and dynamics of family life negatively.

It is arguable that in the cases where the parents perceived their children to reject their adopted role as 'teacher' in home-schooling activities, that the children were implicitly rejecting Foucault's model of the 'good learner'. The frustrations described by many of the participants in their role as home-schooling 'teacher' also implies a rejection of this role, and possibly the overlapping of the domains of education and family. Many parents do choose to home school their children but the elective nature of this activity seems to contrast with many of the experiences of parents in this research, where the decision to home-school came from an external source. Similar examples of role-rejection were found by Lee and Wenham (2023), who report that children had little inherent motivation to complete lockdown home school-work and parents were expected to compensate with extrinsic motivation.

Conclusions

Overall, this innovative research brings insights into experiences of education in crisis conditions with regard to the impact on parent-child relationships. Parents in this research constructed a range of different responses to the directive to home-school their children, which included both positive and negative influences on the parent-child relationship. In some cases, the introduction of the education domain and the role of 'parent-teacher' into the family domain caused significant conflict. In other cases, home-

schooling was positioned as an opportunity to strengthen the parent-child relationship and include educational aspects in their appreciation of their children and their development. Recent research on attachment theory indicates that the environment in which relationships are established has an impact on the level of attachment and this is more volatile and subject to change than previously thought (Fearon & Roisman, 2017). This aspect of attachment theory seems to be reflected in the participant sample for this study in which, for some parents, established attachment bonds were quickly challenged and changed in the context of Covid lockdown home-schooling. However, the findings also suggest that the psychological response of the individual has a role in determining how relationships are influenced. For example, some participants describe the competing demands of home-schooling and the parents' work activity as an opportunity to explore how to timetable family life, whilst others described this as a direct sources of conflict in the parent-child relationship. In this context, the self-efficacy of the parents in supporting their child's learning seems to have been an important influence on the parent-child relationship.

The aim of this research was to explore and describe the impact of lockdown home-schooling on parent-child relationships but there are a number of limitations that frame the findings and discussion. Data collection was opportunistic and time-limited due to the unique context of the pandemic. An unintended outcome of this process was a female-only sample. Due to the demographics of the sample, the data analysis was limited to the perspectives of female parents and therefore to the female parent-child relationship. The perspectives of male parents were not excluded but neither can we claim that our findings are inclusive of parents of all gender orientations. By necessity, data collection was conducted remotely via audio-visual links. This allowed access to participants at a time when movements outside the home were still restricted, but did not allow the richness or depth of information that face to face interview would have provided. Finally, the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis provides a unique perspective on the operation of government policy in the family domain but seeks to provide insights into this particular participant sample rather than generalisable findings. For this reason, implications for practice cannot be drawn directly from the findings.

This research provides a significant contribution to the research field of crisis education. The findings from this study confirm those of many previous studies into the impact of limited time and space, the role of self-efficacy of the parents and the development of children's independence during home-schooling. Of particular note in this study was the description of the ways in which the parent-child attachment bond was disrupted in some cases and the readiness of some children to challenge this change. The extent and speed at which those same attachment bonds were restored or re-established after home-schooling would be a worthwhile area for future research. As this research was limited to the discursive constructions of female parents, further research could usefully be conducted focussed on male parent's experiences of crisis education and those of other gender orientations. This would further explore the implications of emergency policy change on family dynamics.

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Authors contributions

TW: Conceptualization, formal analysis (lead), writing–original draft, methodology (lead). AK: Conceptualization (lead), supervision, methodology, writing–review and editing. AL: Conceptualization, writing–review and editing.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author, AL. The data are not publicly available due their containing information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

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